SUMMARY

In 2005 a Review of Complaint Handling in Victorian Universities was undertaken by the Victorian Ombudsman’s Office.

As a result, the University established The Student Complaints Office within the Equity and Student Services Division. The office has been in operation since January 2011.

The University is committed to an effective complaints handling mechanism for students with a view to creating a harmonious and productive study environment. Analysis of the pattern and resolution of complaints will assist in improving the quality of service to students.

This report is an overview of the operational developments of the student complaints system, including a statistical analysis of complaints received by the Student Complaints Office for the period 1st January 2011 until 31st December 2011.

The University recognises that an effective complaints management system will not only improve customer service, but will also assist in the identification of systemic and re-occurring problems.

The key goals of the implementation of the Student Complaints Office are to:

- Highlight key risk areas for the University
- Enable the University to measure the cost of complaint handling and to subsequently reduce it through a system that enables complainants to access the appropriate complaint service and prevent double handling of the same issue.
- To identify key areas of where complaints have originated and use this information to improve the student experience.
- Increase transparency of the complaint handling process for both staff and students, and to increase confidence in handling complaints in a timely manner with a consistent approach.
KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- Student Complaints Management Policy and Procedures developed, reviewed and approved by Planning and Resources Committee, 10 June 2011, Minute 37.10.

- **Student Complaints website** went live in August 2011 and has received 790 hits for the period 1st August 2011 until 31st December 2011.

- Of the 80 complaints received by the Student Complaints Office, 45 complaints were able to be resolved within a seven day period, 78 within a 30 days period. Only two complaints took longer than 30 days. Refer to graph on page 6.

- Student Complaints Liaison Officers have been identified in all Faculties and Libraries, including Regional Campuses. The list is now included on the Student Complaints website as initial contacts for students with complaints.

- Training in the area of Complaints Handling for Front Line Staff, has been delivered to 50 staff on the Melbourne, Bendigo and Mildura Campuses to date.

- Training in the area of Writing Effective Case Notes has been delivered to 18 staff at the Melbourne campus to date. Staff included academic and general staff from Faculty of Health Sciences; general staff from Equity & Diversity Centre; student advocates; and residential staff.

- The complaints database was released in June 2011, and is centrally managed by the Student Complaints Office. The database is a TRIM system which has the capacity to categorize complaints by campus, faculty, type and category.

TYPES OF COMPLAINTS

![Complaints by Category](image-url)
Examples of Administrative complaints:

- Incorrect information or advice from front line staff
- Results being posted in a timely manner
- Fee related
- Customer service

Examples of Academic complaints:

- Miscommunication with Teaching Staff
- Assessed work not being handed back in a timely manner
- Students having difficulty in contacting Academics to make appointments or to have telephone discussions.

Examples of Residential Services Complaints:

- Maintenance issues
- Fees

Examples of complaints categorised as Other:

- Security/Lighting
- Equipment
- Lighting in Lecture Theatres
- Parking
- Privacy

Of the 80 complaints received by the Student Complaints Office, 25% of complaints were submitted by International Students. These complaints consisted of 30% academic, 30% administrative, 35% other and 5% residential.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE STUDENT COMPLAINTS OFFICE

![Faculty Enrolled Chart]
This data identifies the faculty the student was enrolled at the time of the complaint. However, a percentage of complaints were not submitted against the faculty, but include issues relating to either residential, parking, security and safety.

![Complaints by Campus](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACULTY</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>Residential</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business, Economics &amp; Law</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities &amp; Social Science</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science, Technology &amp; Engineering</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Training to faculty and general staff to raise awareness of student complaint handling processes, including new Policy and Procedures, has been delivered to the Mildura and Bendigo campuses to date. This training will be made available to Albury/Wodonga and Shepparton on an ongoing basis. Marketing material has been distributed.
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION TIMEFRAMES

The Student Complaints Management Policy requires faculty and department staff to respond to complaints within a timely manner, i.e. 10 days.

Data shows that the majority of student complaints were able to be resolved with the assistance of the Student Complaints Office, within a one to three day timeframe.

![Complaint Resolution Timeframe](chart.png)

Complaints generally take place when the student believes there has been miscommunication, or the student has been unsuccessful in their attempts to have their complaint “heard” by faculty staff, or the student has not been successful in their attempts to contact the academic, lecturer or tutor to arrange an appointment.

In relation to student experiences, the Student Complaints Office has received feedback that at times, interactions with staff from different levels within the University have not always been positive. Students have discussed issues in relation to attitude, service culture, and an understanding of cultural diversity issues.

The Students Complaints Office is introducing an online feedback mechanism for students, accessible to them via a link on the Student Complaints Website. One of the categories to be included will be Customer Service, e.g. quality of personal interaction with students and accuracy of information.
EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Manager, Student Complaints Office initiated the co-ordination of a Student Complaints Network Group. There is now representation on this group from RMIT, Monash, Swinburne, Melbourne and Deakin University.

The Manager, Student Complaints Office will continue to participate in the annual National Ombuds, Deans of Students and Complaint Managers Workshop.

INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Manager, Student Complaints Office continues to develop relationships with staff in Faculties and Service areas.

The Manager, Student Complaints Office continues to co-ordinate bi-monthly staff network luncheons.

The Student Complaints Office continues to develop relationships with Student Advocates employed by the La Trobe University Student Union.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Student Complaints Office has received common, queries/complaints relating to following areas:

*Residential Services*

- Complaints included frustration around the timeliness of maintenance issues being resolved resulting in potential OH&S issues.
- Difficulty in accessing staff to discuss concerns or complaints with.
- Residential Services processes and appeals not clear.
Faculties

- Students not being able to access Academics to review work or receive assistance, either through consultation or emails.
- Students not receiving marked work back in a timely manner.

There is evidence to suggest that a number of complaints are the result of student’s experiences when dealing directly with staff. This concern may be addressed by providing front line staff opportunities in developing their skills through training in the following areas:

- Responding to distressed students
- Complaints Handling for front-line staff
- Effective Communication Skills
- Diversity/Cultural Awareness

During 2012, the Student Complaints Office will commence consultation with Learning and Organisational Development, People and Culture, with a view to identifying possible professional development opportunities for staff.

Further training in the areas of:

- Mental health first aid
- Communication skills
- Equity and diversity, and
- Responding to distressed students/staff and difficult behaviour

may be accessible through either the University Counselling Service or the Equality and Diversity Centre. Additional training may be available externally.

The Student Complaints Office can also provide assistance to senior faculty staff in the area of complaints handling and investigation, including:

- How to Investigate Complaints
- Managing ‘Unreasonable Complainants

The Student Complaints Office continues to develop relationships with key staff within Faculties and Service Areas in order to provide support and information to staff identified to handle the investigation of complaints and responses to students.

PRIORITIES FOR 2012

Continue to develop and raise awareness of staff and students in relation to the Student Complaints Office.

Ensuring the Student Complaints Liaison Officers Network effectively functions.
Data Collection:

During 2012, the current data collection (administrative, academic, other) will be expanded to include the following Complaint Categories:

- Assessment
- Bullying
- Customer Service
- Exams
- Feedback only
- Fees
- Inappropriate behavior
- Maintenance
- Parking
- Payments/allowances
- Results/marks
- Scholarships
- Timetabling
- Enrolment
- Show Cause
- Appeals

Also in 2012, additional data will be recorded identifying which service area in the University the complaint was generated from, including:

- International
- Library
- Residential
- Security
- Student Hub
- Student Union
- Careers & Employment
- Counselling
- Equality & Diversity
- Indigenous Student Services
- Finance

Staff:

The Student Complaints Office has developed a 2012 Staff Training Calendar that will provide Training/workshop opportunities on the following topics:

- Overview of LTU's Academic Policies
- How To Investigate Complaints
- Managing Unreasonable Complainants
- Responding to Distressed Students
- Privacy and FOI
- Effective Case Note Training

Continue developing of the Student Complaints Liaison Officer Network Group, to provide front line staff with support, training and debriefing in their role.

Encourage staff to use the centralised system of recording complaints.

The Student Complaints Office will be providing Annual Reports on complaints processes and outcomes. These reports will assist in the identification of problem areas and assist functional areas to address emerging problems.

Students:

Improve student awareness and access to the University complaints process.

The Student Complaints Office continues to disseminate materials, marketing the service to students, including brochures and bookmarks.
In 2012 posters will be designed and printed and placed in high traffic student areas. The Student Complaints Office information will also be listed in both the 2012 Student Diary and Handbook.

The Student Complaints Office continues to collate data in relation to the access of the Student Complaints website.

A student feedback questionnaire is being developed and will be accessed via the web page. This data will be included in subsequent Annual Reports.

**SERVICE TO SENIOR STAFF**

The Manager, Student Complaints Office is available to speak with Deans and Divisional Managers in relation to relevant issues.

**Gail Bowen**

Manager, Student Complaints Office

Equity & Student Services