

Robbie Ewen Fellowship 2013

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'Explore the processes and procedures within the Australian National University Division of Student Administration and to share with the sector examples of good practice in terms of student administration'.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Proposal

My proposal for the Robbie Ewen Fellowship was to visit the Australian National University (ANU) Division of Student Administration (DSA). The Division of Student Administration within the Australian National University encompasses all student administration including Student Business Systems, Student Records and Enrolment, Exams and Graduations and Academic Standards and Quality, similar in structure to that of the Glasgow School of Art Registry.

1.2 Choice of Case Study

During 2011/12 the Australian National University conducted a series of detailed reviews in relation to its student administration. The reviews were University-wide and not only focused on the structure through which they delivered the services, but also on the functions. ANU is also considered if the policies and procedures governing these activities were clear and complete and whether the business processes that aligned to these policies and procedures were the most effective and efficient. The recommendations from these reviews subsequently led to a high quality and responsive student administration service being developed.

1.3 The Australian National University

The Australian National University is a celebrated place of intensive research, education and policy engagement. ANU is home to an interconnected community of scholars and is one of the world's leading universities, recognised internationally for its cutting-edge research and excellence in teaching. The University is located in the heart of Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, Australia. ANU has approximately 17,000 students and 4,000 staff.

ANU has been ranked 25 in the world and the highest ranked Australian university by the Quacquarelli Symonds Top Universities rankings. It has the best student to staff ratio of any Australian university and has a smaller cohort of students to allow them engage more closely with professors and lecturers.

ANU has seven academic colleges that house a number of schools and research centres that specialise in a range of disciplines.

Students at ANU have more choice of programmes than those at other Australian universities. These programmes include world-leading flexible double degree programmes that allow the students to configure over 750 possible course combinations, in addition to single and research-intensive undergraduate and graduate programs.

2. Context

2.1 Purpose of Project

The purpose of my project was to

Explore the processes and procedures within the Australian National University Division of Student Administration and to share with the sector examples of good practice in terms of student administration.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

In particular I aimed to focus in particular on Student Records, Enrolment, Graduation, processes and procedures and Academic Standards and Quality.

To enable me to do this my plan was to

- Explore the policies and procedures within the Australian National University Division of Student Administration
- Gain a fresh insight and consider their suitability for adaption within the Glasgow School of Art Registry and the UK sector
- Use the experience to establish how the Australian National University's infrastructure and effective administrative system have enhanced the student experience
- Use the experience to provide the sector with examples of high quality and responsive student administration
- Understand how the Division of Student Administration has developed its student administration function to enhance the Australian National University's reputation and to attract and educate outstanding students.
- Develop links with an overseas institution such as the Australian National University

3. Findings

3.1 Background

In 2012 the Division of Registrar & Student Services (DRSS) was divided into the Division of Student Services (DSS) and Division of Student Administration within the academic portfolio of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

The rationale and nature of change was to ensure that high quality and responsive services were delivered effectively.

ANU believed that a clear and consistent system to support and guide students was needed and by implementing a more customer centric service delivery model for student facing services this would provide a more obvious point of contact in a central geographical space, providing quick and effective responses to enquiries.

The change undergone by ANU reflects the vision and directly supports the University's strategy for success in achieving its core objective, by:

- Providing outstanding infrastructure and effective administrative systems
- Further enhancing the campus experience for all students; and

- Providing a richer residential experience for on-campus students and more opportunities for engagement of off-campus students

3.2 Quality

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) was established in 2011 as part of the Australian Government's Transforming Australia's Higher Education Initiative, taking over the activities of the Australian Universities Quality Agency and integrating activities by similar state government regulatory bodies. This led to significant changes in the external landscape for Universities therefore it was critical that ANU ensured that the Divisions central to the delivery of student-facing services, administration and compliance in this changed landscape were fit for purpose. In particular, University approaches to student governance, administration and support are measured against standards that set thresholds around their availability and transparency, including accessibility across various student cohorts. TEQSA also conducts thematic audits across the sector into particular aspects of higher education provider business and so drives the need for the Division to be able to provide more comprehensive information relating to their activities and those of the University.

The proposed functional and structural changes were both proactive and reactive: responding to the University's strategic vision and TEQSA requirements; and anticipating a fit for purpose architecture required for implementing a consistent service delivery model across the ANU campus.

The Academic Standards and Quality Office (ASQO) within ANU is responsible for providing advice, direction and compliance implementation for the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA), the Education Services for Overseas Students Act (ESOS) and ANU Policy, Procedures and Rules. Also included in their responsibilities is providing advice on international student regulations, maintaining international student records, registration of ANU programmes and administration of the US Financial Aid Scheme.

A month prior to my visit, October 2013, ANU carried out an internal audit of the ANU policy framework. In response to the recommendations of the audit the University was planning to undertake a complete revision of its policy governance framework. It was anticipated that whilst reviewing and redrafting the present policy base would be a lengthy exercise, the end result would be a more streamlined and consistent bank of policies.

3.3 Australian National University Survey Results

The 2012 University Experience Survey concluded that the Australian National University was below the national average in the following areas:

- Availability of administrative staff and systems
- Helpfulness of administrative staff and systems
- Induction and orientation
- Support students received to settle into ANU

The ANU Telephone and Email Benchmarking Report (May 2012) also quantified a lower result for service delivery at ANU within the broader tertiary sector. In the report, Customer Service Benchmarking Australia recommended that the University strives to improve its service delivery performance and improve Enquiry Resolution Skills, which registered below the Tertiary Sector result.

The 2011 University staff survey identified internal processes, cross-unit cooperation and staff communication as areas in which the University could make some improvements.

An overwhelming majority of Student Administration and Student Services staff made similar observations at the two consultative workshops regarding student support services. Staff were asked their views regarding current communication practices, student experience and recommendations for change. Responses included:

- Advice to students can be unhelpful when they are passed around between divisions and colleges trying to seek resolution.
- We are institution focused instead of being student focused.
- Finding information can be difficult.
- Organisational complexity should be owned by staff, not student.
- Complex processes with multiple points of contact.
- Conflict between administration and customer service.
- If the University wants to operate efficiently and provide better consistent services then the University has to invest towards change.
- As professionals: compassionate and caring; conscious of student's needs/expectations (however, we're sometimes unable to deliver on those expectations – lack of resources).

3.4 Student Administration and Records

Student administration support at ANU incorporates general student administration processing. The team, 'Student Administration and Records' (STAR) has responsibility for end-to-end processes in the management of students' records and allows staff to broaden their understanding of enrolment and programme management and impacts on fee and scholarship administration.

The Division of Student Administration is structured into six teams, with each team reporting directly to the Registrar, Student Administration.

- Student Business Systems
- Student Records and Enrolment
- Fees and Scholarships
- Exams, Graduations, Prizes and Timetabling
- Academic Standards and Quality
- Business Office (shared services with DSS and the Division of International Operations and Student Recruitment)

STAR manages progression activities – including enrolment, fee payments, scholarship maintenance, transfers and leaves of absence. Examinations, Graduations and Prizes (EGP) isbe focussed on outcomes in assessing, awarding and completing students.

The Division of Student Services provides high quality student-facing services through the following teams, which reports directly to the Registrar Student Services:

- Academic Skills and Learning
- Careers Centre
- SIGN Mentoring Programme
- Special Projects
- Counselling and Disability Services

- Student Health Service
- International Student Services

The Divisions of Student Administration and Student Services aim is to ensure that high quality and responsive services are delivered effectively. They believe that the experience of students is crucial not only to individual well-being, development and achievement, but also to the reputation of the University and its aim to attract and educate outstanding citizens.

3.5 Student Experience and Transition

The recent creation of a Student Experience and Transition team resulted in a small number of cognate areas being brought together under single leadership for the first time. The reconfiguration of these areas also provided a more agile and responsive staffing structure. Furthermore creation of the team provided the opportunity to enhance partnerships, working across the academic and professional community and eliminate duplication of effort that previously existed.

The Student Experience and Transition team are responsible for transition to, through and out of the University and coordination of co-curricular activities and engagement and includes:

- working in collaboration with the Colleges and other key stakeholders to deliver a high quality consistent and holistic transition experience for new students from all backgrounds
- supporting the experience and empowerment of all students to achieve their full potential throughout their degree and transition to employment
- engaging students in their learning
- developing and matching the user technologies and student expectations as they transition to University
- understanding the varying circumstances and the needs of the students
- defining a suitable transition information framework including a road map of communications and identify what students need to know in each week of the first semester and beyond

For the first time at ANU this has brought together advice and support for all students regardless of nationality. Previously support of international students was provided by a small team. The creation of the Student Experience and Enhancement team has provided the opportunity to integrate the student support provided for both domestic and international students. The creation of the team also provided the opportunity to build upon substantial work already done on students' experience in the first few months and first year of study, nurturing student engagement and academic achievement.

3.6 Student Administration Services

Student administration within ANU has moved towards a version of a 'one-stop shop', Student Central, for all student enquiries, to consolidate face-to-face, email and phone communication for students. Student Information Services (SIS) provides all students with one location, one email, one phone number, as the primary gateway to accessing transactions, services, administration and support. The team deal with enquiries and requests by way of a triage system involving three tiers of enquiries and requests

- Tier One - for common and simple enquiries, transaction and referrals across all matters relating to students.

- Tier Two – for complex, unique or unusual cases that require investigation/follow up and are referred from Tier One.
- Tier Three – complex issues that are referred from Tier Two and must be escalated, for example, grievances and complaints, matters involving senior University staff, external authorities, or media.

Student Information Services are also a communication team, with a vested interest in having a presence on Campus, with easy routes to contact them and open lines of communication. This means that not only are the team accessible via the student counter, through phone and email, but they have also introduced Mobile Student Information Officers.

The Mobile Student Information Officers project facilitates students engaging with staff whilst in their own space, and at their convenience. Staff from the Student Information Services team are sent out to common locations across the ANU campus to raise awareness of information services, advertise key dates, and associate the Student Information Services office with a more accessible level of interaction.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

It was evident throughout my time spent at the Australian National University that the Division of Student Administration staff are totally committed to supporting students in achieving the best university experience for the duration of their studies. The department is the main gateway for students and staff for all administrative functions related to the student lifecycle.

All Higher Education Institutions require an administrative structure that is able to manage an increase in the diversity of student undertakings, coupled with consistent and transparent business processes. If we were to follow the Australian National University model, institutions would have to first of all assess the organisation and alignment of business functions and staffing structures to determine whether they are fit for purpose and deliver the best outcomes for students.

It is important that any proposed change to the student administration includes a justification for the benefits sufficient to warrant the effort required for the change. In addition consideration must be given to the most appropriate and beneficial points of service delivery for student administration and these should be promoted to students and staff.

4.2 Recommendations

- The student experience should be the driver behind the design of processes and strategies for service delivery and enhancement across the institution.
- Institutions must ensure that their functional and staffing structures are robust and can accommodate the provision of responsive, high quality services.
- Clear and consistent systems must be in place which support and guide students.
- Institutions should consider University-led initiatives in streamlining and simplifying administrative processes and service delivery.
- There must be clarity around roles and responsibilities with an emphasis on consistency and achievement of best practice.
- Institutions should consider enhanced staff engagement and opportunities for development and advancement in the student administration profession.

5. Benefits of the Trip

The Robbie Ewen Fellowship allowed me to visit and spend time in the Australian National University, providing me with the opportunity to compare and contrast the Australian Education System, particularly in relation to student administration, to that of the UK. I returned with numerous documents which have been shared with colleagues within the Glasgow School of Art. In addition I have also shared examples of good practice,

predominately in terms of processes and procedures related to the Academic Registry functions.

I especially enjoyed visiting and spending time in the Australian National University School of Art which specialises in visual arts, media art and design, and was fortunate enough to be given a tour by the Head of School during the set up of their degree show, surprisingly similar to Glasgow School of Art's annual degree show.

I made many new friends and had an amazing trip, and I am very grateful to the Robbie Ewen Fellowship and the Trustees for giving me this opportunity.