



ANNUAL REPORT

2023-24

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INTRODUCTION



The Student Advice Service was established in 2010 to provide free, confidential, and independent advice, information and representation to all Cambridge University students, undergraduate and postgraduate, from all 31 Colleges. Students can access the Advice Service with any issues they might experience during their time at the University of Cambridge. Students who are intermitting, or who recently graduated are also able to access the Advice Service for support.

Advisors work by a code of practice that assures students that they will receive free, confidential, impartial, non-directive, and non-judgmental advice. As a generalist advice service, the Advice Service complements other more specialised University service providers such as the Counselling Service and the Accessibility and Disability Resource Centre which deal with more specialist advice. Advisors can also work closely with tutors, other University or College service providers and departmental staff members if the student feels this would be useful.

ADVICE WORK



Advice Work

The Advice Service is available to all students studying at the University of Cambridge for support and guidance on any issue or problem they might experience whilst studying here. We support students on a wide range of issues, and our independence from the university makes us unique in the support that we can offer to students on a wide range of academic and welfare issues. Student cases are often complex and involve many interrelated issues. Students typically access the Advice Service with a particular issue; however, during the course of their interactions with an advisor, it is common for additional issues or concerns to emerge. It is rare that a student's situation or issue does not impact on other aspects of their academic or welfare life at the University.

The level of support and guidance provided is informed and led by the student and varies in each case.

In line with the advice sector's framework for defining the types of advice provided, the Advice Service splits cases into three categories - 'Information', 'Advice', and 'Advice with Casework'.

Other types of Advice Work

The Advice Service is tailored toward directly supporting students. Nevertheless, contact by users who are not current Cambridge students is not uncommon. This includes past and prospective students, offer holders, students on intermission, students who are off the register, and visiting students. In 2023-2024, this accounted for 19% of those who accessed the service.



The Advice Service also records information regarding non-student users; for example, parents, relatives or friends of a student seeking advice for their loved-ones. Whilst we provide advice to non-student users, this is often limited and is usually focused on helping the non-student user encourage the student to access the Advice Service or support within their College. Our aim is to always work with the student directly. More informally, we also continue to welcome contact from tutors, other service providers and staff across the Collegiate University who wish to discuss with us options that may be available to a student they are supporting.

National Advice Community

The Advice Service is a member of Advice UK (the UK's largest support network for free, independent advice centres), AMOSSHE (Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education), UKCISA (UK Council for International Student Affairs) and has benefitted from the access to training, resources and advice that membership of these organisations affords. In addition, the Advice Service has access to the NUS Workplace platform, where students' union advisors from across the higher and further education sector share knowledge and good practice.

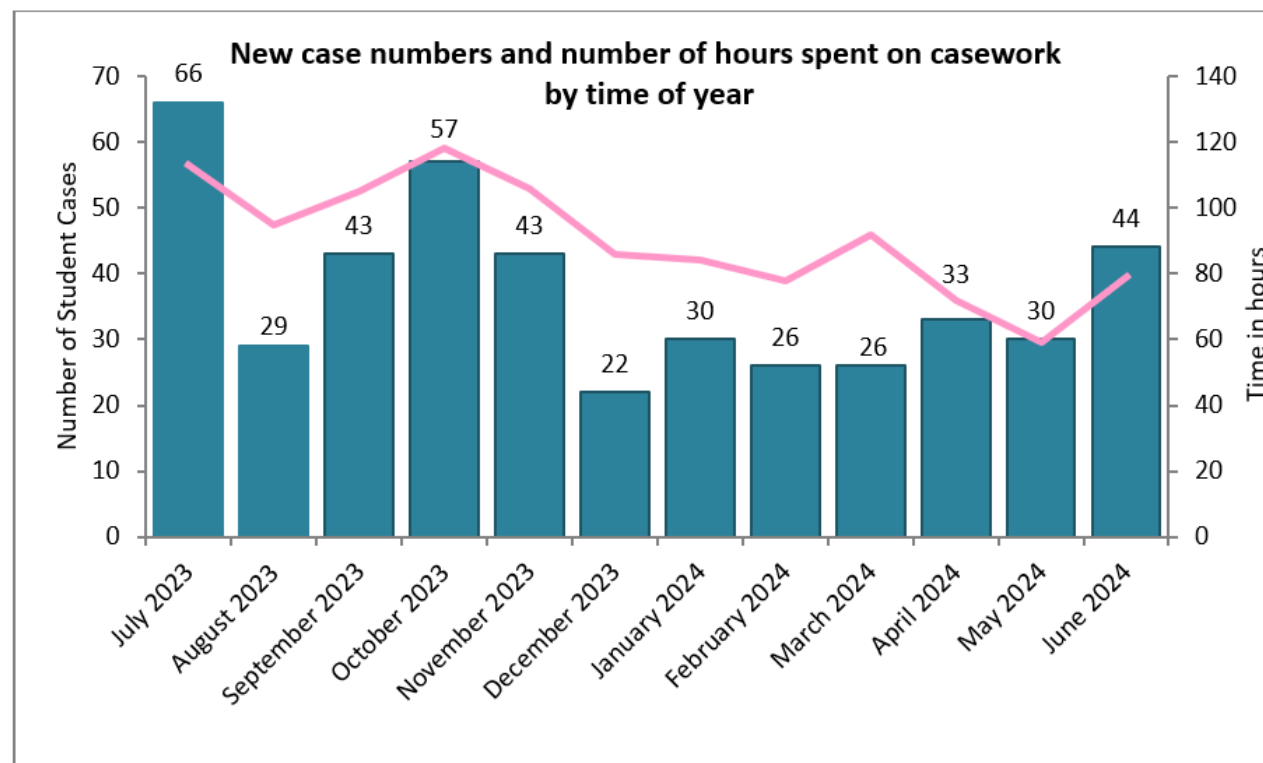


STATISTICS AND TRENDS

Service user data is gathered through the completion of the registration and monitoring forms. As this data is volunteered to us by students we do not have a complete set of personal data for every service user. The following measures of data were taken from the time period 1st July 2023 to 30th June 2024.

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The Student Advice Service is open throughout the year, including outside of academic term time. The adjacent graph demonstrates the changing demand in the number of cases over the course of the reporting year. The most significant spike in cases is in July, as students receive their exam marks, and enquire about examination allowances, examination reviews, disciplinary action (plagiarism) or advice on what options were available in light of their results



Number of student cases by month v total number of hours spent on casework

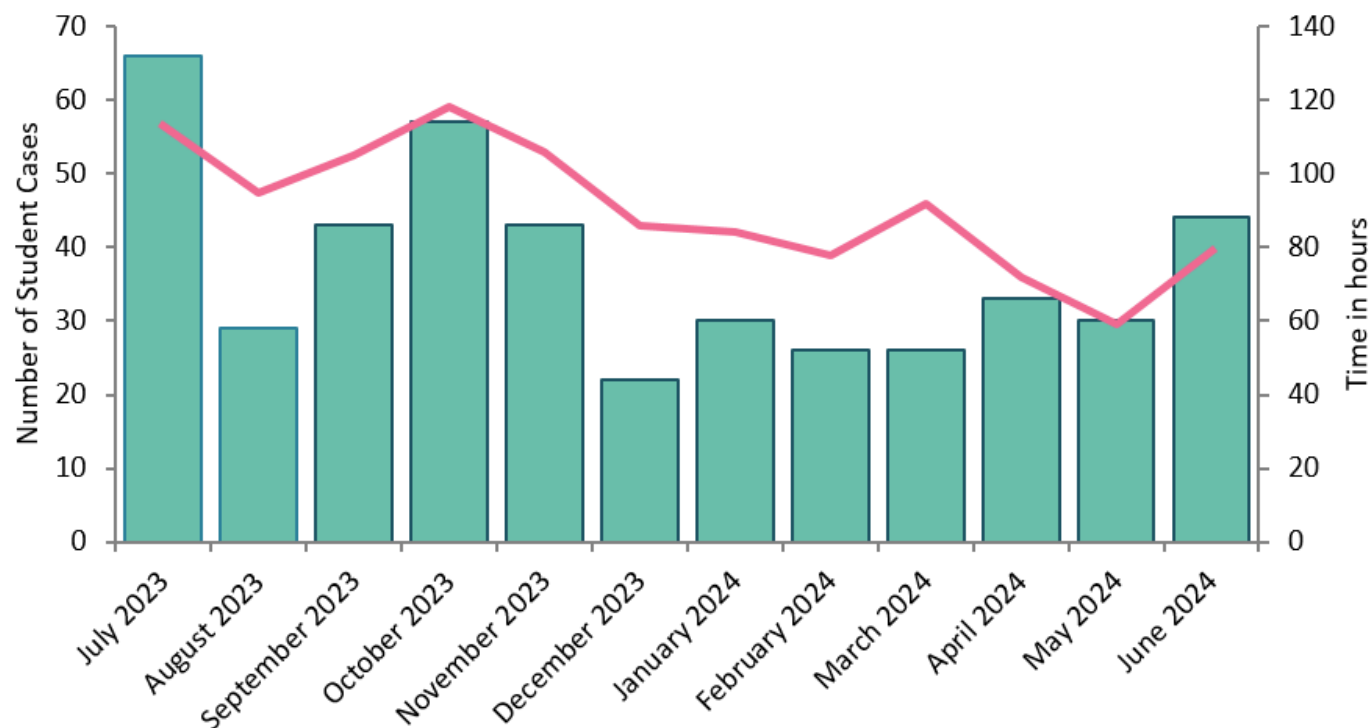
SERVICE USERS



In 2023-24, the Student Advice Service worked with a total of 520 service users of which 449 were students (including current students, intermitting, off the register, past, visiting, exchange, JBS and ICE students).

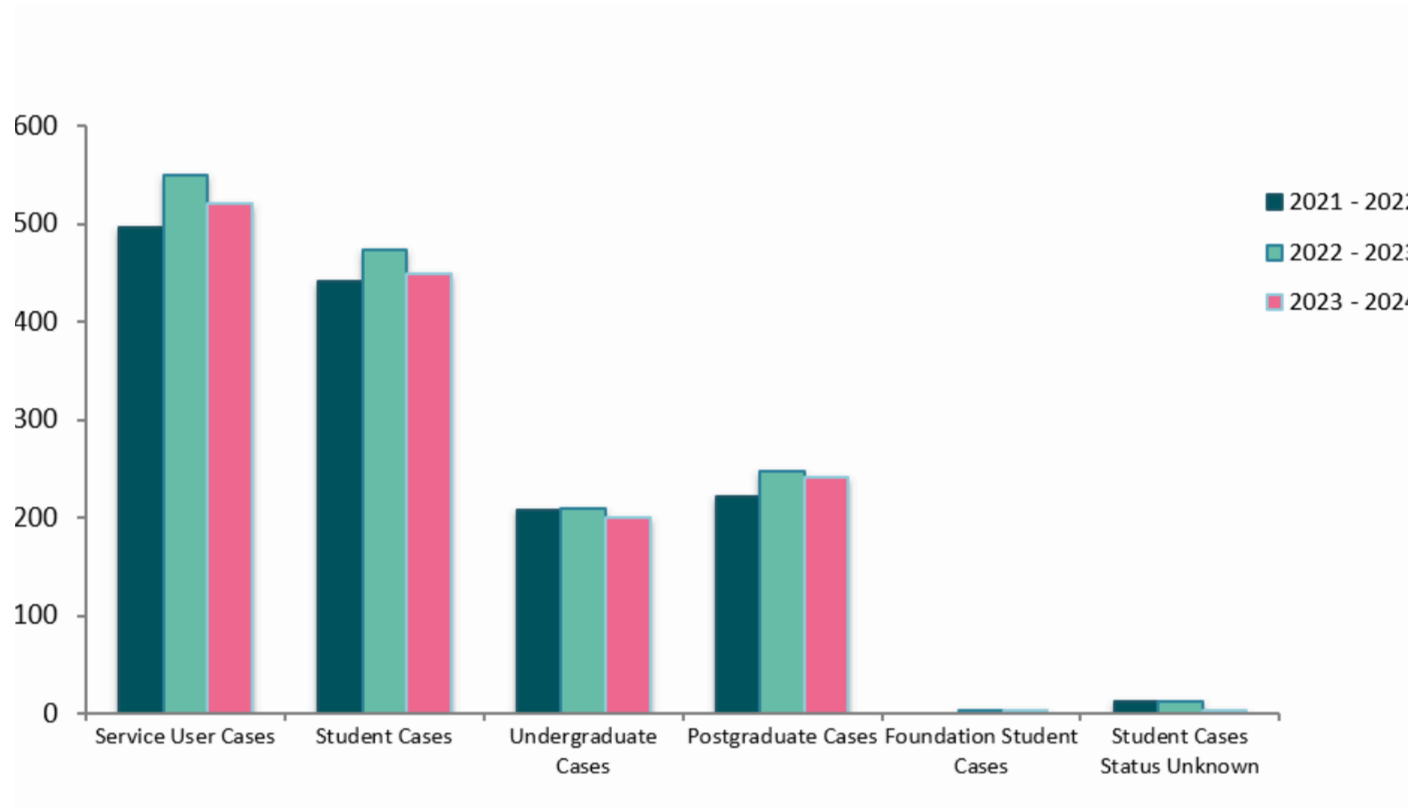
Students who use the service for more than one issue are recorded as a new case on each occasion therefore our actual number of service user cases for the year was 549, of these:

- 35 students accessed the service twice
- 6 students accessed the service three times
- 1 student accessed the service five times



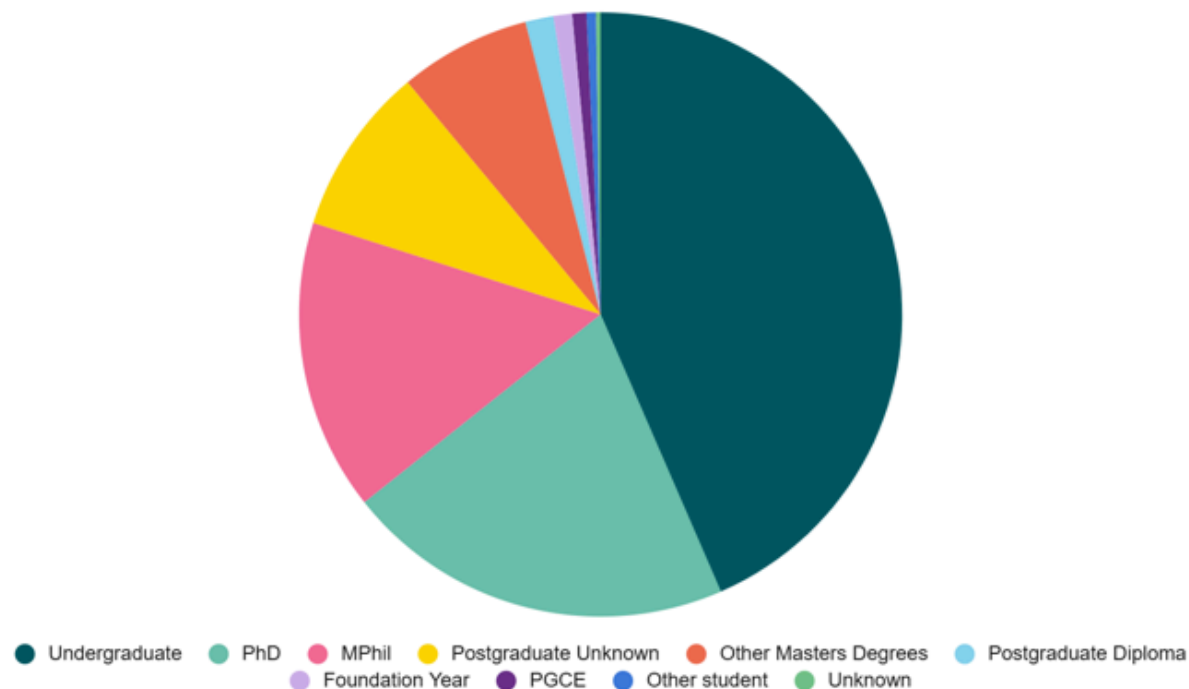
Case numbers and time spent on cases by month

STUDENT STATUS



The Student Advice Service works with service-users across a range of profiles. Current students, past, prospective and offer holder students or students on intermission. Additionally we provide information to non-students, such as relatives or friends of students, JCR/MCR Officers, Liberation Campaign Officers and Sports Welfare Officers who can access the Advice Service to discuss their specific role or any concerns they may have about a student in their community. In 2023-24 74% of service users were current students.



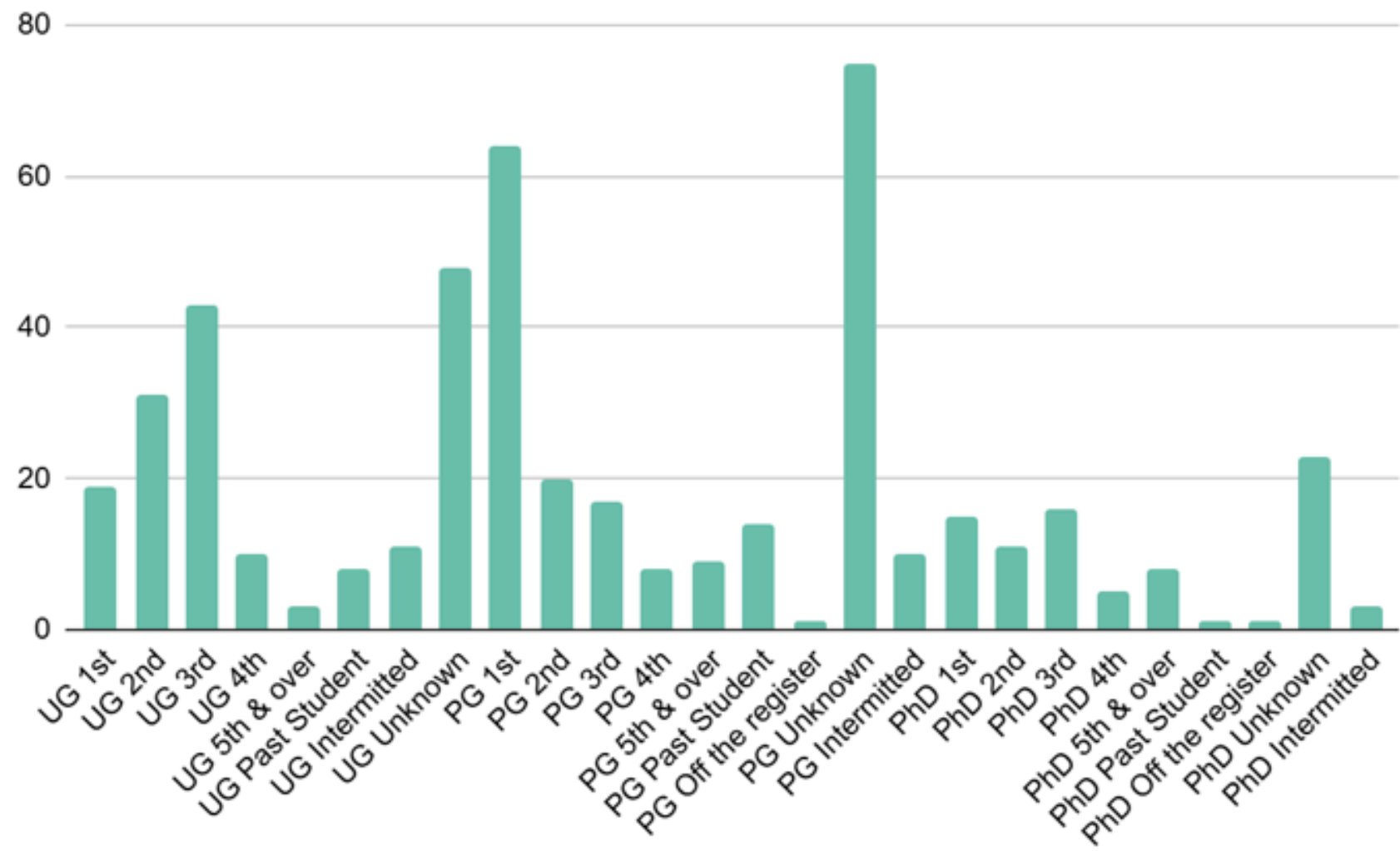


Students accessing the advice service by type of study

The Student Advice Service continues to support students across a wide range of degrees. 43% of students accessing the service in 23-24 were undergraduates, 21% were studying towards a PhD, 16% were MPhil students and 7% studying towards other Masters degrees. We saw a further 9% of students from unknown postgraduate qualifications, 3 students were studying for a PGCE, 6 students were studying for a postgraduate diploma, 4 students were on a foundation year, and 3 students we do not have data for. This continues a trend we have seen over the past five years for seeing more postgraduate students seeking advice from the service.



YEAR OF STUDY



In 2023-24, 15% of undergraduate students who accessed the service and recorded their year of study were in their first year of study, 25% in their second year, 34% in their third year of study, 8% in their 4th year of study, 2% were in their 5th or higher year, 6% were a past undergraduate student, and 9% were a student on intermission.

Of the students who shared their year of postgraduate study with us, 45% who accessed advice in 23-24 were in their first year of study, this is a significant reduction in the 73% from 22-23 but still higher than the 29% in 21-22. The category of 'postgraduate' includes PhD students, MPhil, MFin, MBA, MRes, MSt, MEd, LLM and PGCE students. Within these sub-categories, usage of the Advice Service varies.

For PhD student service users, of the students who have disclosed their year of study, our largest cohort was from students in their 3rd year of study at 29%. Students in their 1st year of study make up 23%, 2nd year make up 17% of PhD cases, 4th-9%, 5th year and over 15%. 3 students were on intermission, 1 student was a off register, and one student was formally a PhD student.

COLLEGE MEMBERSHIP



In 2023-24, the Student Advice Service supported students from all 31 Colleges. The number of students accessing the Advice Service from each College varies yearly and is not necessarily linked to the size of the College, the provision available from the College, or its proximity to the Advice Service. It should not be taken as an indication of the effectiveness or quality of support offered within different colleges. It is important to note that Cambridge SU considers it to be good practice for colleges to inform their students that they can receive independent advice via the Advice Service.

AWARENESS OF THE SERVICE



Found out about the service via	Number	Percentage
ADRC	11	12%
Cambridge SU Website	13	14%
Returning Student	10	11%
Web search	8	9%
Friend/s	8	9%
Other	4	4%
University Counselling Service	6	6%
Cambridge SU Officer	5	5%
College Senior Tutor/Tutor	3	3%
Cambridge SU staff	5	5%
College staff Welfare Advisor/Counsellor/Nurse/Tutorial Office	4	4%
University OSCCA	3	3%
University Supervisor	3	3%
University Staff Other	3	3%
Cambridge SU Bulletin	2	2%
College staff (other)	2	2%
University webpage	1	1%
Advice Pop-Up session	1	1%
Freshers' Fair	1	1%
SAS leaflet	1	1%
Total	94	100%

How students learn of the Student Advice Service

Of the students who disclosed how they first heard about the Student Advice Service-

● 29%

Signposted by a University service provider or staff member, such as the Disability Resource Centre, Counselling Service, OSCCA, or departmental administrator

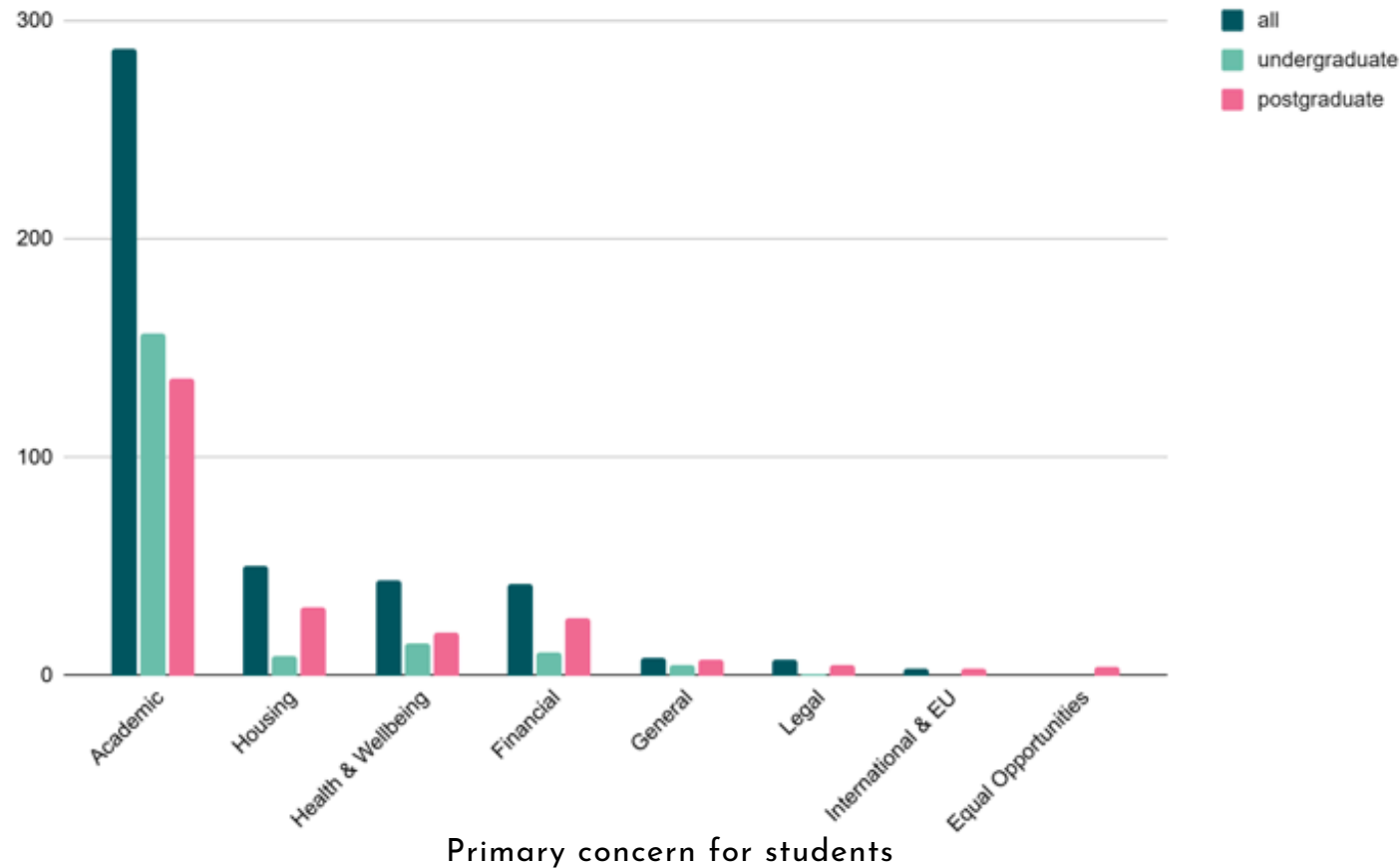
● 10%

Signposted by a College service-provider or staff member, such as Tutor, Senior Tutor, Nurse, Chaplain

● 30%

Signposted by Cambridge SU officers, staff members, events or advertising

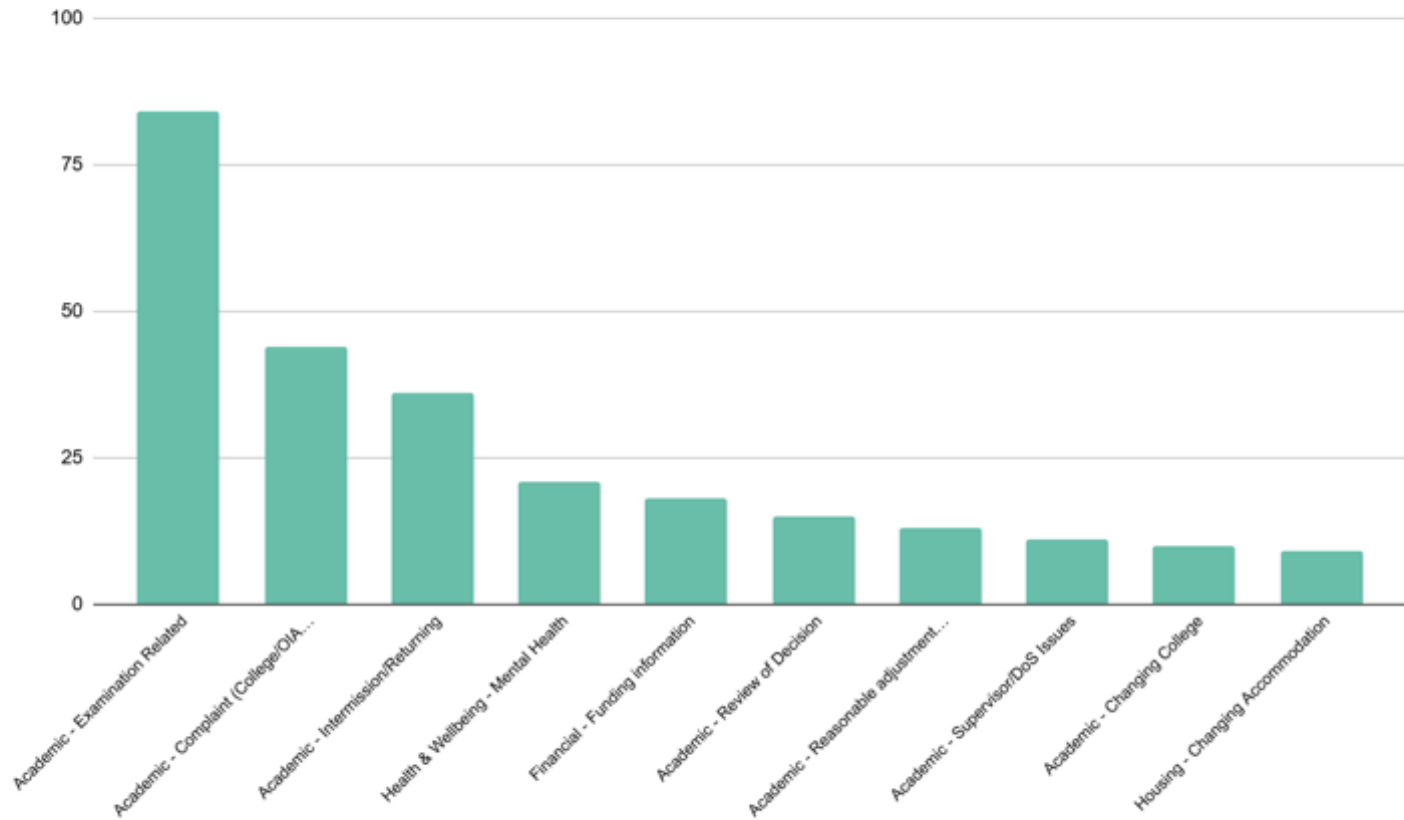
STUDENT CONCERNS



The Student Advice Service assists students on a number of issues each year, these range from exam concerns to financial difficulties to intermission and issues regarding student-supervisor relations. Students will often come to the Advice Service for guidance and support on a specific issue (e.g. exam failure); it may then transpire during the discussion with the advisor that other issues are linked to the primary issue raised. For example, though few students access the Advice Service specifically for advice on mental health, many students raise mental health as a factor contributing to the issue for which they require support.

In the academic year 2023-24 the leading areas of concern for students booking their appointment was issues related to examinations, 84 cases were opened where this was the student’s primary concern, down from 115 the previous academic year. Examination concerns include concerns over an exam result, degree classification/calculation, paper issues and technical difficulties, PhD registration, progression to part III, examination allowance, examination review, examination resits, examination worries and disregarding terms. The next highest area of concern was concerning academic complaints, with a total of 44 cases, down from 64 the previous year.

The next highest area of concern was concerning complaints, with 36 undergraduate cases and 28 postgraduate complaint cases totaling 64 overall.



Advisors record all key issues that a student wishes to seek advice on, therefore the number of issues recorded is higher than the number of students who accessed the service, as the majority of students raised more than one issue. The academic year 23-24 saw the same the same trends in leading appointments as the previous year. The leading issue that both undergraduate and postgraduate students sought advice on was examination-related, with 19% of cases covering this topic. Students sought advice on making Complaints in 10% of cases, 8% of cases concerned intermission. Advice on mental health was sought in 5% of advice cases.

RESOURCES



The Student Advice Service have developed student guidance pages on the Cambridge SU website, which clearly explains the different options available to students facing an issue and directs them through university processes including with proforma paperwork. In the academic year 23/24 the Information and Guidance page saw 2369 hits , while the more detailed pages of Exams and Assessment saw 1266 hits , 1062 on Finance, 951 on Accommodation, 843 on Academic, 442 on Anti-Racism, 247 on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. These high numbers of users interacting with our online resources demonstrate a higher figure of students benefiting from the advice service resources beyond those working directly with an Advisor.

SEXUAL HEALTH SCHEME



The Sexual Health Scheme is delivered by Cambridge SU and exists to enable students to engage in safer sex by distributing a variety of free sexual health products to colleges via J/MCR officers. Colleges can request up to 2 packs at a time, and each pack contains over 200 sexual health items including a variety of condoms, female condoms, lubricant and pregnancy tests. The scheme remains popular and in 23/24 a total of 277 packs were supplied to colleges alongside the free supply of products in the SU lounge. The ability of Cambridge SU to provide free sexual health products through the SHS ensures that J/MCR welfare budgets can be used on alternative and specific college welfare initiatives; it also allows all colleges to have equal and fair access to the same products.

Following feedback from colleges that they needed some items more readily than others, the booking request form has been amended to allow students to either request standard packs of supplies, or request specific items.

At the start of the academic year 24-25 we introduced a pregnancy test request service, allowing students to discreetly ask for 2 pregnancy tests to be sent to them via UMS and delivered the next day to their pigeon hole.

DEMOGRAPHICS

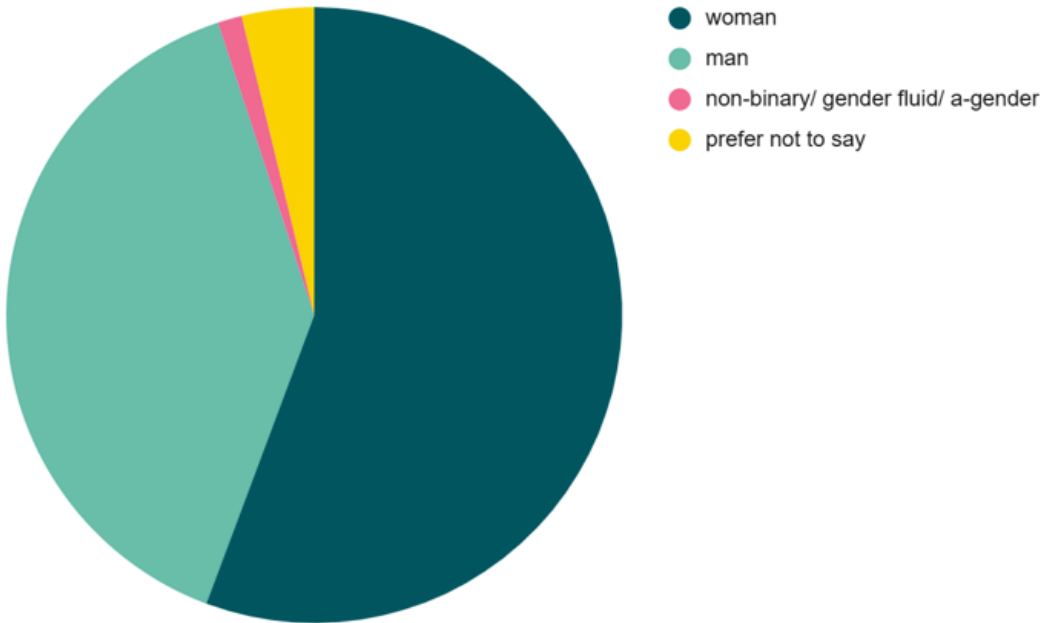


GENDER

The service records gender data based on how a student declares their gender on the monitoring form. If a monitoring form is not received, for example, if the case is short-lived (such as some of those under the 'Information' category), or if communication with a service user is entirely by email, then the gender is recorded as undisclosed.

From the data that we hold 56% identify as female., 39% identified as male, 1% identified as non-binary/ gender queer/ gender fluid or a gender, and 4% chose prefer not to say. This is a higher ratio of female students accessing the service than the number of female students enrolled at the university. (50.2% at Undergraduate level, 53.1% at Post Graduate Taught and 47.7% at Post Graduate Research-The Cambridge University Equality and Diversity and Information Report 2023-24)

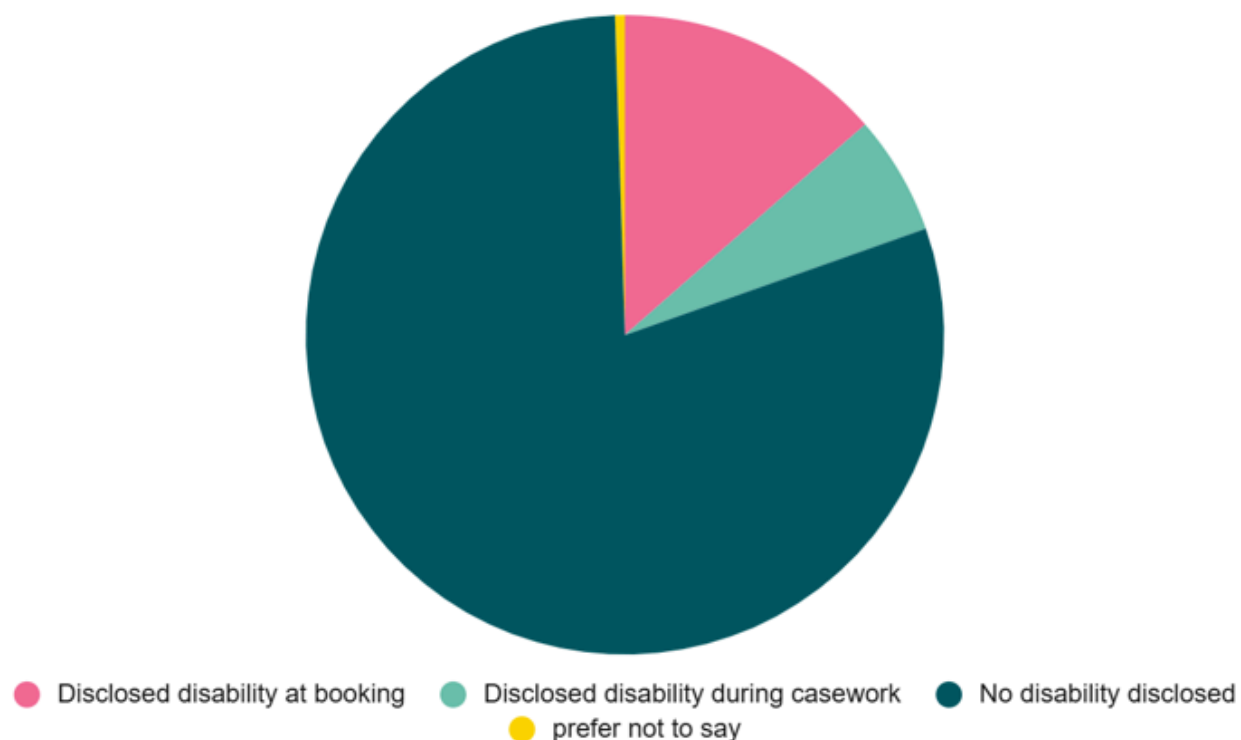
This is a continuing trend for the Advice Service and highlights an area of work to promote the service to male, nonbinary and transgender students.



Gender of students who disclosed this information to the service

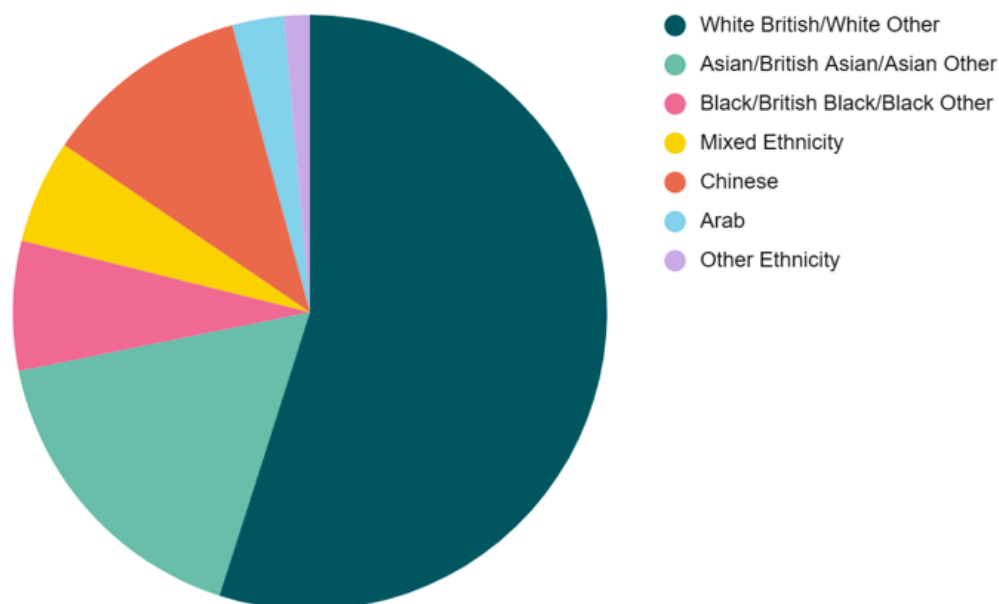
DISABILITY

The Student Advice Service requests that students self declare disabilities on the monitoring forms that students complete when confirming an appointment. In 2023-2024, 54 students disclosed a disability via the monitoring form. This represents 14% of the students who accessed the Service. An additional 24 students mentioned a possible disability to their Advisor during an advice appointment, raising the total to 20%. In 2023-24 the number and proportion of students who declare a disability to the university at UG level was 19.3% students, 17.1% of taught PGT students and 16.0% of PGR students



ETHNICITY

In 2023-24, using our monitoring forms when confirming student appointments, we recorded ethnicity data of 71 students. Of the students who disclosed their ethnicity, 'White' students represented the largest group (55%), followed by 'Asian/Asian British' students (17%), 'Chinese' students (11%), 'Black/Black British' students (7%), 'Mixed/Multiple Ethnicity' students (6%), Arab (3%) and 'Other Ethnicities' (16%). Students from ethnicities other than 'White' represented 45% of students. In 2022-23 the advice service recorded 54% of the students accessing the service to have disclosed their ethnicity as non-white.



The Cambridge University Equality and Diversity Information Report 2023-2024 reports that Cambridge student membership is made up of 39.3% BME students at undergraduate level, 45.7% at Post Graduate Taught, and 42.1% at Post Graduate Research, totaling 41% students identifying as non-white.

The advice service figure sitting above all these measures would indicate that BME students are experiencing more issues than white students, or that BME students are more aware of the service. In November 2023 the Student Advice Service recruited a BME Advisor to offer specialised advice to BME students, and to create materials for students and forge relationships with the university and colleges.

The Cambridge University Equality and Diversity and Information Report 2023-24edi_information_report_2023-24_.pdf

CONTACT

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