A large, purple, teardrop-shaped graphic with a white outline, resembling a speech bubble, is centered on the page. It contains the text 'Students' Unions' Advice Service' in a bold, sans-serif font. The words 'Students' and 'Unions' are in orange, while 'Advice Service' is in white.

**Students'
Unions'
Advice
Service**

**Students' Unions' Advice Service
Annual Report
June 2016**

FOREWORD

POPPY ELLIS LOGAN, CUSU-GU WELFARE AND RIGHTS OFFICER

When I ran for the post of CUSU-GU Welfare & Rights Officer, I didn't know about the Advice Service, and although the entire role was very new to me, the nature of the Service was a particularly unknown quantity. Upon receiving my training and learning about the nature of the Service, I came to wish that I had known about it during my time as a student and JCR Welfare Officer as it seemed to me to be an invaluable service, one for which demand should be high. This really motivated me to do all that I could during my term to ensure that the Service was and is publicised more widely.

As such, I have sought to make sure that at every College, every Welfare Officer, and I hope in due course, every student, will at least know that the Advice Service exists. Amongst my manifesto aims for the year was joining up all of the different welfare services into a coherent 'whole', and working towards ensuring that Welfare Officers were thoroughly trained to provide a quality service to students. By the end of my Advice Service training, it was clear to me that there would be no better way to achieve both of these intentions than via the Advice Service - which already had links to the different welfare support networks around the Collegiate University.

This year has been hectic for everyone involved with CUSU and the Graduate Union, and intense - as I'm sure life is at any students' union. The Advice Service has been incredibly valuable to us all, and I have particularly enjoyed its supportive and professional approach which has been the one consistent area of my time at CUSU and the Graduate Union. Amongst many other things, my role on the Advice Service team this year has taught me to really value the sanctity of our consistent (weekly) Reflective Practice - where everyone's roles are defined, everyone's input is valued, and where the discussion is not about us but about providing a quality service to students. Regardless of the pressures that elected sabbatical officers face, the Advice Service has continued to work smoothly and consistently, just as it has to, like clockwork.

LISA DÉRY, ADVICE SERVICE MANAGER

This has been a great year for the Students' Unions' Advice Service. Our efforts to raise awareness about the Service seem to be paying off as we have seen a 48% increase in the number of students accessing the Service as compared to last year. This is no doubt in part due to the dedication of the members of this year's team who have gone to great lengths to promote the Service.

We have also experienced some exciting changes such as a new name and rebranding of the Service (from "Student Advice Service" to "Students' Unions' Advice Service"). Another important development has been CUSU's move to 17 Mill Lane, where CUSU and the Graduate Union are accommodated in the same building. The Advice Service is therefore now located in one place which has removed the logistical issues involved with staff moving between sites. The move generated an opportunity for us to create a lovely new casework room where students can be seen confidentially in a comfortable setting.

In particular this year, I have enjoyed building relationships with several of the Schools of the University who have welcomed all of our ideas for raising awareness of the Service amongst their staff and students. Our

engagement was met with such enthusiasm that some of the Schools invited us to provide basic student support training to their administrators who work with students, which we were pleased to offer.

The feedback we received from students continues to be positive and demonstrates our determination to give every service user a positive experience of the Service.

Finally, this year, we have been able to dedicate more time towards our goal of gaining the Advice Quality Standard, with its associated standard of excellence. We feel optimistic that we may have obtained this standard by this time next year.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Now in its sixth year, the Students' Unions' Advice Service is a well-established component of the support network in place for students at the Collegiate University. The Service fulfils a vital function within this network - the provision of independent, confidential and professional advice to students. Whilst maintaining its clear independence, the Service has also developed strong links with a range of other service providers, and as such is able to make a strong contribution to student support at Cambridge.

The Service operates with two full-time advisors, underpinning the professional aspect of the advice and support we are able to offer. This has meant that the majority of the casework undertaken by the Service has been handled by the professional advisors, with only cases at particularly busy times or cases that closely align with their own areas of interest being undertaken by the three sabbatical officers who also work within the Service. In the past, the workload and the pressure that casework has placed upon sabbatical officers (particularly the Welfare and Rights Officer) has been a concern to the Service, but the increased capacity in staff over the last three years has gone a long way towards alleviating this. It has also allowed us to add real value to developing student support in a range of other ways. These will be detailed later in the report, but include the provision of training to University staff and participation in College staff training, informed contributions to discussions on a mediation service and the process for changing College, and an increase in awareness-raising activities (relating both to the Service itself and a range of relevant issues) among students. Sabbatical officers are also able to dedicate more time to promoting the Service if the volume of casework they undertake is of a manageable level. For instance, this year the Service held its largest number of roadshows to date, including its first roadshow at the West Cambridge site.

During the 2015-16 academic year, the Service was accessed by 298 service users of which 246 were students. Students from all Colleges and a range of departments and institutions have come to us for advice. This represents a 48% growth in the number of students we worked with (and a 39% increase in service users) when compared to the 2014-15 year. Our figures this past year are also greater than they were in the 2013-14 year. Students approach the Service for help with a variety of issues. For example, students might come to us for help in understanding academic-related procedures such as examination appeals or allowances, with concerns over their physical or mental health, and a variety of other issues related to student life such as finance or isolation. The knowledge and experience of the Service has therefore continued to grow, and this is supplemented by professional training and development undertaken by the full-time advisors. The sabbatical officers involved in the Service continue to benefit from a thorough training programme at the start of their term in office, ensuring that the support given to students is always of a high standard. Through our membership of the National Association of Student Money Advisers (NASMA) and working with colleagues at the Union Advice Service of the University of East Anglia, we have also been able to expand our capacity to provide advice on student finance matters.

The number of students accessing the Service over previous years has undoubtedly been affected by the building works taking place on the New Museums Site. The reduction in the number of students accessing that site owing to the refurbishment of a number of its buildings reduced student traffic into CUSU's offices in the Old Examination Hall. CUSU's new premises at 17 Mill Lane, where it is now located alongside the Graduate Union, mean that both students' unions have been co-located since September 2015. This brings with it significant benefits, as all advisors are now working in the same building each day that the Service is open. We have additionally benefitted from a new casework room, which provides a comfortable and confidential space for students to see an Advice Officer. The growth in the number of students accessing the

building for the range of activities it hosts will raise student awareness of the Service, and will likely contribute to even more students accessing it.

The Service is pleased with the various ways in which it has developed over the past year. Its new name and branding appear to have proven to be effective, its co-location has enhanced the effectiveness of the team, and it has undertaken more awareness-raising activities than ever. This work has also brought about a significant growth in the number of students we have supported. Furthermore, our commitment to developing a Service of the highest possible quality has led to us committing to obtaining the Advice Quality Standard (AQS), and work has started to produce the necessary evidence required for this. In summary, 2015-16 has been a successful year for the Advice Service, and we look forward to seeing this work continuing to enhance student support at Cambridge in the years to come.

2. MEMBERSHIP OF THE STUDENTS' UNIONS' ADVICE SERVICE

The Students' Unions' Advice Service is composed of five Advice Officers of whom two are staff members and three are sabbatical officers. A sabbatical officer's term lasts 12 months and begins and ends in July every year. As such, the Service welcomes three new members to the team every year. To the Service, the sabbatical officers bring their experience as students of the Collegiate University, while staff members bring professional experience, knowledge and institutional memory. These different backgrounds contribute to the overall success and professionalism of the Students' Unions' Advice Service.

2015-16

- Lisa Déry (CUSU-GU Advice Service Manager)
- Rachel Wilson (CUSU-GU Student Advisor)
- Poppy Ellis Logan (CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer and lead officer for the Advice Service)
- Rob Cashman (CUSU Education Officer)
- Charlie Chorley (CUSU Women's Officer)

2016-17

- Lisa Déry (CUSU-GU Advice Service Manager)
- Gemma Douglas (CUSU-GU Student Advisor, maternity cover for Rachel Wilson)
- Sophie Buck (CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer and lead officer for the Advice Service)
- Roberta Huldish (CUSU Education Officer)
- Audrey Sebatindira (CUSU Women's Officer)

3. STUDENTS' UNIONS' ADVICE SERVICE DEFINED

The Students' Unions' Advice Service (SUAS) provides free, confidential, and independent advice, information and representation to all Cambridge University Students, undergraduate and graduate, from all 31 Colleges. Students can come to the Service with any issues they might experience during their time at Cambridge University. As an impartial service, Advice Officers don't take sides or make value judgments.

The Advice Service is provided by Cambridge University Students' Union and the Graduate Union and is open Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm, all year round. Students can expect to be warmly welcomed by all members of the Advice Service team.

The goal of Advice Officers is to make every person's experience of the Advice Service positive regardless of the complexity or sensitivity of the matter. As such, Advice Officers work by a Code of Practice which assures students that they will receive free, confidential, impartial, non-directive and non-judgmental advice as well as a prompt response (one working day maximum).

As generalist advisers, the Students' Unions' Advice Service complements other more specialised University service providers such as the Counselling Service or the Disability Resource Centre which deal with more specific issues such as mental health and disabilities. Advice Officers can also work closely with tutors, other University or College service providers and departmental staff members if the student feels that this would be useful.

4. ACTIVITIES

A. CASEWORK ACTIVITIES

CASEWORK DEFINED

The Students' Unions' Advice Service is open to all students at Cambridge. Individuals can come to the Service with any issues or problems that they might experience as a student - from questions about their education or navigating University procedures, to concerns about their physical or mental health. The issues experienced by students using the Service are often complex and regularly involve many inter-related concerns (for example a health issue and exam allowances, or intermission and finances). A student might approach the Service with one particular issue in mind, but others may emerge during the course of subsequent communications.

This means that the Service helps students with a broad range of issues, with a varying degree of involvement in each case. For example, an Advisor may help a student explore their options and navigate University or College procedures over several appointments, and may also attend meetings with a student in their College or the University. Other cases, however, may require less intensive work - for example, talking through a straightforward application to the Applications Committee or simply providing a listening ear and referring a student to another service. Some case studies are included as an appendix to this report to provide some examples of the role of the Service in different scenarios.

Following the advice sector’s framework for defining the types of advice provided, the Service splits cases into three categories - Information, Advice, and Advice with Casework – which are defined as follows:

Information

- Providing general information that is readily available to students (e.g. student clubs and societies etc.)
- Signposting/referring a student to another service/person/agency
- Assisting students to find the information that relates to their enquiry i.e. leaflets, website addresses, links to relevant regulations etc.

Advice

- All that is included in “Information”
- Conducting our own research to find information that would not be readily available to students (includes contacting third parties anonymously or with consent)
- Exploring options with a student (e.g. discussing in person, by phone or by email the possible options with a student and discussing the pros and cons of each)

Advice with Casework

- All that is included in “Information” and “Advice”
- Discussing options over several meetings/phone calls/email exchanges
- Practical help on submissions (proofreading, drafting etc.)
- With their consent, discussing a student’s case with a third party (e.g. Tutor, DRC, DoS etc.)
- Attending a meeting with a student
- Representing a student at College or University level

OTHER TYPES OF CASEWORK

While the Students’ Unions’ Advice Service is geared towards directly supporting students, we are often approached by users who are not current Cambridge students. For example, non-standard users might include past and prospective students, students on intermission, students who are off the register, and visiting students. The Service continues to consistently record information regarding the status of all service-users.

Furthermore, the Service continues to record information regarding non-student users - for example, a number of parents, relatives or friends of students ask for advice. Though non-student users approach the Service on a regular basis, the aim is always to work with the student directly. Therefore, the advice we provide to non-student users is often limited and is usually focused on helping the non-student user encourage the student to access the Service themselves.

A service is also provided for JCR/MCR and Peer2Peer volunteers who specifically want advice that relates to their role or to discuss any concerns they may have about a student they are supporting. More detail is provided later in this report (see Links with other Organisations).

More informally, the Service continues to welcome contact from tutors, other service-providers and administrators across the Collegiate University who feel that it may be useful to explore with us options that may be available to a student they are supporting.

MAINTAINING QUALITY STANDARDS

Maintaining a consistently high quality of service is vital to the continued success of the Students' Unions' Advice Service. With the annual turnover of the sabbatical Advice Officers, the effectiveness of induction and quality assurance mechanisms is particularly important in ensuring that every member of the team can provide students with an excellent standard of support. New officers undergo a thorough training programme at the start of their term in office before undertaking casework, delivered by internal and external providers and providing new officers with a wide-range of skills and knowledge. The Service also utilises a peer observation scheme throughout the year, where all Advisors are observed by another team member and offered constructive feedback on how they might improve their skills.

In addition, each week, all Advice Officers meet for reflective practice – this provides an opportunity to share best practice, discuss challenging cases and explore options together, and reflect on how Advice Officers might improve the level of support they offer to individual students. This is coupled with a session for “business-related” items which can contain anything from relevant committee updates to planning the activities of the Advice Service for the coming weeks, or identification and discussion of upcoming issues students might bring to the Service e.g. exam warnings and allowances, or withholding names from class lists. The Advice Service Manager leads the team in maintaining an up-to-date knowledge of training and professional standards and may therefore use this time to discuss possible changes to current practice in line with this understanding.

The professional development of permanent staff is also central to the Service's quality enhancement. To this end, the Advice Service Manager receives supervision sessions at the Counselling Service, where she has the opportunity to confidentially reflect on her work. The Student Advisor has also received supervision from the Advice Service Manager during the course of this year.

DEVELOPING INTERNAL PROCEDURES

As we are working towards achieving the Advice Quality Standard (AQS), this has been a productive year in terms of further developing the Advice Service's internal procedures. Organisations who apply for the Advice Quality Standard must demonstrate that they provide advice and/or outline options to service users. This requirement has allowed us to define more precisely how we work and who we work with.

The information is mainly laid out in the Students' Unions' Advice Service handbook which includes for example information about the profile and needs of our service-users, the aims of the Service and what methods and resources we use to ensure that Advice Officers provide current and correct information to students. All of this is in addition to the Service's existing internal policy such as confidentiality, code of practice, peer observation and independent file review.

B. TRAINING

ADVICE OFFICERS

To ensure that Advice Officers are able to offer the highest level of support, every sabbatical officer involved in providing support to students underwent an extensive 50 hour programme of training throughout the year (particularly over the summer). Sessions included:

- Introduction to the Students' Unions' Advice Service
- Students' Unions' Advice Service – how it works and why
- Core Skills Parts I and II (active listening, confidentiality, boundaries, non-directive advice, referrals)
- Introduction to Casework Parts I and II
- Support in Cambridge (College, University, City, nationally)
- Outside of the Advice Service Room (representing students, representing the Advice Service)
- Mental Health and the Student Community
- Reducing the Risk of Student Suicide
- Equality and Diversity (provided by E&D)
- Working with Disabled Students (provided by DRC)
- Bullying, Harassment, Sexual Assault
- Meeting and visiting University and College Service Providers

These training sessions were mainly offered by the Advice Service Manager and Student Advisor with some sessions being offered by external providers and internal providers. Advice Officers have reported to have found the training useful not only to their roles as Advice Officers but also to their roles as student representatives outside of the Service. The Advice Service Manager and our professional Student Advisor have also received training in the following areas:

- Advanced Skills in Advice (Advice UK)
- Student Money Advice (University of East Anglia Advice Service)
- Strategies and Options for Dealing with Debt (DMAS CIC)

STUDENT SUPPORT OFFICERS AND PEER2PEER

The Students' Unions' Advice Service has continued to develop its comprehensive training programme for the large network of JCR and MCR Officers and Autonomous Campaigns, ensuring that they have access to adequate support and are able to develop skills in what can often be very demanding roles. Training is made available to any officer of an affiliated common room, and to volunteers of other student-led welfare initiatives such as Peer2Peer, Linkline, Faculty Representatives, and Welfare Officers of societies.

The Advice Service has taken a lead role in the delivery of the welfare training programme which was coordinated jointly by the Welfare and Rights Officer and the Advice Service Manager.

Student Support Officers are highly encouraged to attend the training on offer, especially the “Essential Skills for Supporting Students” session, which covers active listening, confidentiality, boundaries, non-directive and non-judgmental advice, and making quality referrals. Students are advised to not undertake individual student support without it.

This year, the Advice Service was invited to contribute resources to the Student Support Officer Handbook, which was created by the Welfare and Rights Officer for these student-volunteers. The handbook includes essential information about the role of a Student Support Officer, including for example a template confidentiality policy for Officers to employ, which is based on the Service's own confidentiality policy.

The Students' Unions' Advice Service has enjoyed taking a leading role in the development and delivery of the welfare training programme. We hope that our increased contact with student-volunteers will further educate them on the importance of confidentiality, boundaries, and signposting, as well as increase the number of referrals made to the Students' Unions' Advice Service.

TUTORS

For the second year running, the Students' Unions' Advice Service participated in the tutor training programme by delivering a session on the Students' Unions' Advice Service and by providing feedback on the case studies. We look forward to continuing to be involved in this programme, as it not only informs tutors about the existence of the Students' Unions' Advice Service and the important role we have to play, but it also helps to build relationships with colleagues with whom we are likely to have contact in the future.

UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATORS

It was with much enthusiasm that the Students' Unions' Advice Service accepted the invitation to deliver training to University administrators who work with students. In a session entitled "Essential Skills for Supporting Students", participants have the opportunity to think about confidentiality and boundaries and how these apply to their role. Participants also learn to provide active listening, recognise the difference between active listening and advice giving, and to refer students to the appropriate service within the College, the University and the city of Cambridge.

Since its launch in April 2016, there has been a high demand for the session which was delivered on three occasions to administrators in the School of Technology. In the months to come, the Advice Service will also be delivering the session to administrators in the Department of Politics and International Studies and the Judge Business School.

Feedback received from the sessions has been very positive, and participants seemed to have particularly enjoyed sharing their experiences of working with students with other colleagues in similar roles in a training setting that was informative and supportive.

C. PUBLICITY AND EVENTS

It is crucial that students are aware that they can access a professional, independent, and impartial service. It is of course a student's decision whether they choose to use the Service, but it is crucial that they are at least aware of its existence. This is something that can be done in partnership with the Collegiate University, and we are grateful to all College and University staff members who have signposted students to the Service, attended our presentations and integrated information about the Service into their handbooks, websites etc.

In 2014-15, raising students' awareness about the Service was identified as an area for development. Having visited several other advice centres and surveyed colleagues in other institutions to find out more about how students come to know about their Services, we began the year with many new ideas, including rethinking the name and branding of the Service. CUSU sabbatical officers fed into the Students' Unions' Advice Service rebrand and helped the Advice Service team think about how best to reach students. As a result of this, we sought to define more precisely in our publicity what types of advice we can provide to students. Furthermore, we took on board feedback received from our service-users and Cambridge students in general which informed us that many did not recognise that the Advice Service is specifically for students of the University of Cambridge. This seemed to be mainly down to the generic name of the Service i.e. Student Advice Service. As such, the name of the Service was changed to Students' Unions' Advice Service to reflect that it is provided by the Students' Unions - CUSU and the Graduate Union, and exists specifically for students at the University of Cambridge.

The training we have provided to Student Support Officers (JCR and MCR Officers and other student volunteers such as CUSU Autonomous Campaigns, Faculty Reps and Peer2Peer) has been instrumental in raising awareness of the Advice Service, thus allowing student-volunteers who support students to make quality referrals to the Advice Service.

We have also had discussions with the Applications Committee with regard to how they could help raise awareness about the Advice Service at times when the support could be crucial to students. This has culminated in the Advice Service now being mentioned in the email that students receive from the Applications Committee to inform them that their application has been processed and sent to their College.

One particular area of success this year has been the links we have created with several of the Schools of the University. In general, the Schools have invited us to give presentations to staff who work with students and will also be including text regarding the Service in their student handbooks and webpages. We have already seen the benefits of our engagement with the Schools with 9% of the students accessing the Service being referred by a University staff member. We are keen to continue building relationships with key staff within academic departments to ensure that they are also able to signpost students to the Service.

13% of students have been referred to the Service by a University or College service-provider, such as the Counselling Service, Disability Resource Centre, Tutor, or Senior Tutor. We continue our formal visits to service providers every year, and this year we attended twelve tutorial lunches where we had the opportunity to speak to Senior Tutors and their teams about the work we do and how we complement the tutorial system.

Though it has improved, it is clear through the feedback we receive from students, our service-users, and colleagues within the Colleges and the University, that there is still only a small percentage of the student population that know that the Students' Unions' Advice Service exists. This is something that we ourselves need continue to work on improving, and we recognise the importance of doing so in partnership with the Collegiate University.

The Service continues to utilise a wide range of publicity routes, from posters and leaflets in Colleges and departments, to the students' unions' annual and weekly publications and the student press. The Service also has a visible presence at many events throughout the year – such as the CUSU Freshers' Fair, the Graduate Union International Welcome Events and the Disability Resource Centre Transitional Events.

We continue our publicity through social media, advertising the Service by linking in with national awareness events such as Mental Health Week and Dyslexia Awareness Week, as well as with more local themes such as preparing for exams. This also provides an opportunity to distribute self-help resources and raise awareness of other relevant support services throughout the year. Our Facebook post on Depression Awareness Week in April proved to be one of the most popular reaching just over 2000 students, and the Winter Holiday Activity Guide that we created in partnership with the CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer reached 4816 students.

This year, we increased the number of Students' Unions' Advice Service roadshows we were able to offer. This is where we set up a stall at an academic site (e.g. Downing, Sidgwick and West Cambridge) and where possible offer hot drinks and biscuits to students on their way into or out of lectures, in exchange for an opportunity to briefly chat to them about the sorts of things that the Service can offer.

D. WINTER HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES AND GUIDE

In order to reduce isolation and loneliness for students who remained in Cambridge over the winter holiday period, the Students' Unions Advice Service in partnership with the CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer created a Winter Holiday Activity Guide with activities organised specifically for Cambridge students as well as a list of activities open to everyone in Cambridge throughout the holiday period. Colleges were invited to offer a space where students from all of the Colleges might come together for organised activities, and Pembroke kindly accepted our invitation, offering their Graduate Parlour. In addition, St-Edmund's hosted a potluck Christmas day meal in the College which was open to all Cambridge University students and was attended by about 60 students.

Student volunteers who were spending the holidays in Cambridge were recruited to plan and coordinate events with the support of the Advice Service. The group ran nine events including film and board games evenings and a visit to the Botanic Gardens. The most popular events attracted up to 17 students, the attendees were nearly all postgraduate students, most of them international PhD students. The Graduate Union also organised activities during this period with their screenings of family films for student parents and their children being the most popular. Student Clubs and Societies as well as some local organisations were invited to publicise their events to students via the Winter Holiday Guide which was shared with students, Colleges and University service providers.

E. COLLECTING FEEDBACK

All Students' Unions' Advice Service users are invited to provide feedback on their experience of the Service. This is done through a confidential and anonymous on-line survey. 14% of our student service users have responded to the questionnaire since its launch in February 2014. Of those who responded:

- 93% strongly agreed or agreed that their concerns were listened to and taken seriously by the Student Advisor.
- 83% strongly agreed or agreed that the advice they received was relevant, appropriate and clear.
- 83% said they were very likely or likely to recommend the Students' Unions' Advice Service to friends.

To the question "What I like about the Service is...", the following comments are amongst the responses received in 2015-16:

- *"Knowledgeable, incisive, supportive, empowering, caring, life changing. I will always be grateful and never forget what you did for me whatever the outcome."*
- *"Very knowledgeable staff who are very willing to help."*
- *"They took the time to understand my point of view... and got back to me promptly."*
- *"Fast, helpful, seemingly well connected to the relevant authorities."*
- *"That it is objective."*
- *"How quickly I was able to get an appointment."*
- *"its convenience and good communication."*
- *"Quick response and listening environment."*
- *"that it is easily accessible."*

To the question "What I feel you could do to improve the service for students is...", similarly to last year, the majority of responses related to the promotion of the Service. Below are some of the comments:

- *"More advertising around Colleges, it was by chance I stumbled on the stall on the west Cambridge site."*
- *"Improve awareness of existence and capabilities"*
- *"more publicity of the service (I only found out about it very recently)"*
- *"Publicise it more, make students more aware that you can help them."*

The Service is in its third year of receiving feedback, and with the responses we have received so far, it seems clear that students appreciate the knowledge of the advisors, the quality of the listening, the Service's connections to the relevant authorities, and the promptness of the Service. Our service-users feel that we are taking their concerns seriously and the majority feel that we are providing them with clear and relevant advice.

We have, however, noted for the second year that many of our service-users feel that we need to publicise our services more widely. Our efforts to raise awareness about the Service continue and publicity remains a priority as can be seen in the Publicity section of this report. The 48% increase in the number of students who have accessed the Service this year must no doubt be an indication that our publicity has improved but we recognize that this is an area which will continue to require our attention and creativity. Publicity will continue to be an area on which we focus in 2016-17.

5. STATISTICS AND TRENDS

The Students' Unions' Advice Service records information about each case it works on by asking students to complete a casework record form when they access the Service – either via email, phone or in person. Data, such as the number of students, user demographics and issue areas act as indicators which form the Service's development in terms of the quality and comprehensiveness of the advice it can provide. This information also helps the Service to identify trends in student welfare needs, respond efficiently to enquiries and direct students to relevant resources. The Service regularly updates the Cambridge University Students' Union and Graduate Union as to its activities and trends in student welfare issues, which, in turn, facilitates their wider political work in supporting students.

Since the Service is non-judgmental and is committed to providing support to all students, regardless of identity, College or issue, it does not measure success by the number of appeals or complaints that our users have had upheld. The Service's approach to assisting students is to ensure that individuals feel able to make their own decisions given the resources and options available to them. The Service's knowledge and experience with the rules and regulations of the Collegiate University also means that the Advice Officers are well-placed to manage expectations as to the possible outcomes of a complaint or appeal procedure.

The following measures of data were taken from the time period 11th June 2015 to 10th June 2016. Noting trends in the types of issues or students ensures that the Service is well-equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to help the students who approach us. It allows the Service to adapt and evolve, and to develop its sources of support in line with student demand and need.

A. SERVICE USERS

Throughout 2015/16, the Service worked with a total of 298 service users of which 246 were students (students = current, intermitting, off the register, past, visiting, exchange and ICE). We had 11 students that contacted us twice during the year for different reasons, and 1 student that contacted us 3 times during the year each time with a different issue.

This is a marked increase from last year's cycle where the Service worked with 215 service users (39% increase) of which 166 were students (48% increase). This year, the Service has made heightened efforts to increase the publicity and promotion of the Service throughout the student body; alongside a design rebrand, there has also been an increase in leaflets and posters strategically distributed around the University and Colleges and in student welfare packs, as well as several welfare-related events and faculty visits. This combined with strong engagement with student volunteers and CUSU's move to 17 Mill Lane into shared premises with the Graduate Union may account for the increased number of students accessing the Service. There was a notable increase in the number of student cases that emerged via physical drop-in (49 in 2015/16 as opposed to 24 in 2014/15) and email (136 in 2015/16 compared to 72 in the previous cycle).

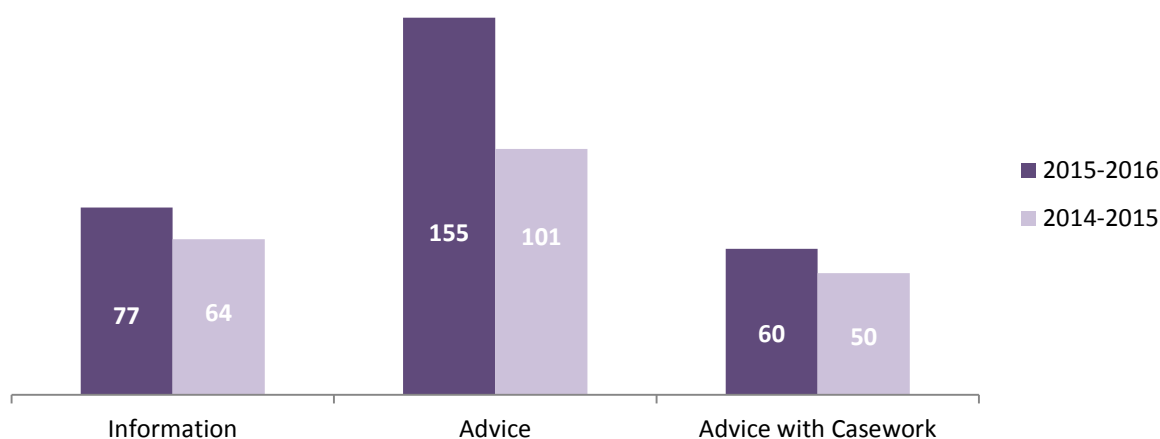
Cases are classified as Information, Advice, or Advice with Casework (as indicated in the Casework Defined section of this report), in line with industry standards. This typology correlates to the level of support each classification requires and the amount of hours invested by the Advice Officer. The breakdown for the 2015/16 cycle was as follows:

Type of advice	Number	Percentage
Information	77	26%
Advice	155	52%
Advice with casework	66	22%
Total	298	100%

Table 1 – Service User Case Type Breakdown

In this cycle there has been an increase in the number of all types of cases from the previous year with a particular increase in Advice, which has risen from 101 cases last year to 155 this year (Graph 1). Despite the increased number of service users this year, Advice remains the Service’s primary type of case load, representing 52% of all cases in this cycle.

Service User Case Type Comparison with previous year



Graph 1 –Comparison of 2014-2015 Service User Case Type to 2015-2016

SERVICE USER STATUS

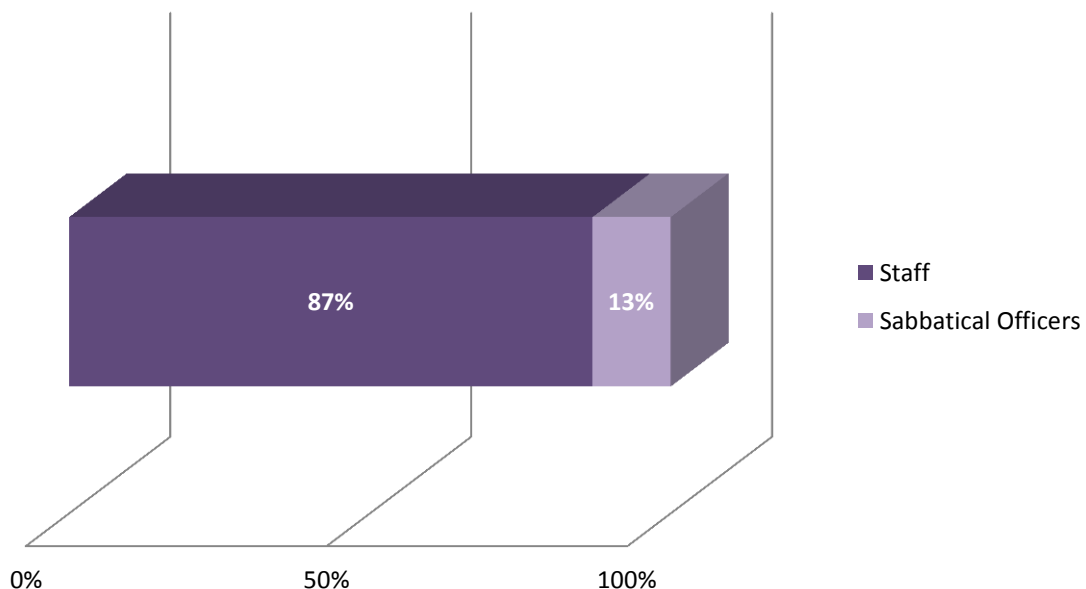
The Service works with users across a range of profiles (Table 2). Current students, non-standard student users (including past and prospective students, or intermitted students), and non-students (such as relatives or friends of students) may all access the Service. The Service also provides advice to JCR/MCR Officers and Peer2Peer Supporters who may use the Service to discuss their specific role or any concerns they may have about a student in their community, or the welfare and academic provision in their College.

71% of the Service users for this year were current students, with the next biggest groups being prospective students or offer holders who made up 9% of the client users, and intermitted students who made up 4% of users. This usage is to be expected, given that the majority of promotional material is distributed around Colleges and the Service has most interaction – via its events and the sabbatical officers – with current students.

Client Status	Number	Percentage
Current student	212	71%
Past Student	16	5%
Intermitted student	11	4%
Off the register	2	1%
Visiting student	2	1%
ICE Student	2	1%
Exchange Student	1	-
Prospective Student	28	9%
Relative of a student	9	3%
JCR/MCR Officer	5	2%
College or university staff	3	1%
Unknown	5	2%
Other	2	1%
Total	298	100%

Table 2 – Status of Service User

With two full-time Student Advisors facilitating the work of the Advice Service alongside three Sabbatical Officers, the majority of service user cases this year have been worked on by the full-time Student Advisor and the Advice Service Manager (*Graph 2*). Sabbatical Officers have carried out casework at times when staff capacity was exceeded, or when cases aligned closely with the officers’ own areas of expertise. The entire Advice Service team meets regularly, on a weekly basis, to discuss their casework and offer advice at Reflective Practice; this allows all members of the team to have an overview of the types of cases coming to the Service and to help in the advice work.

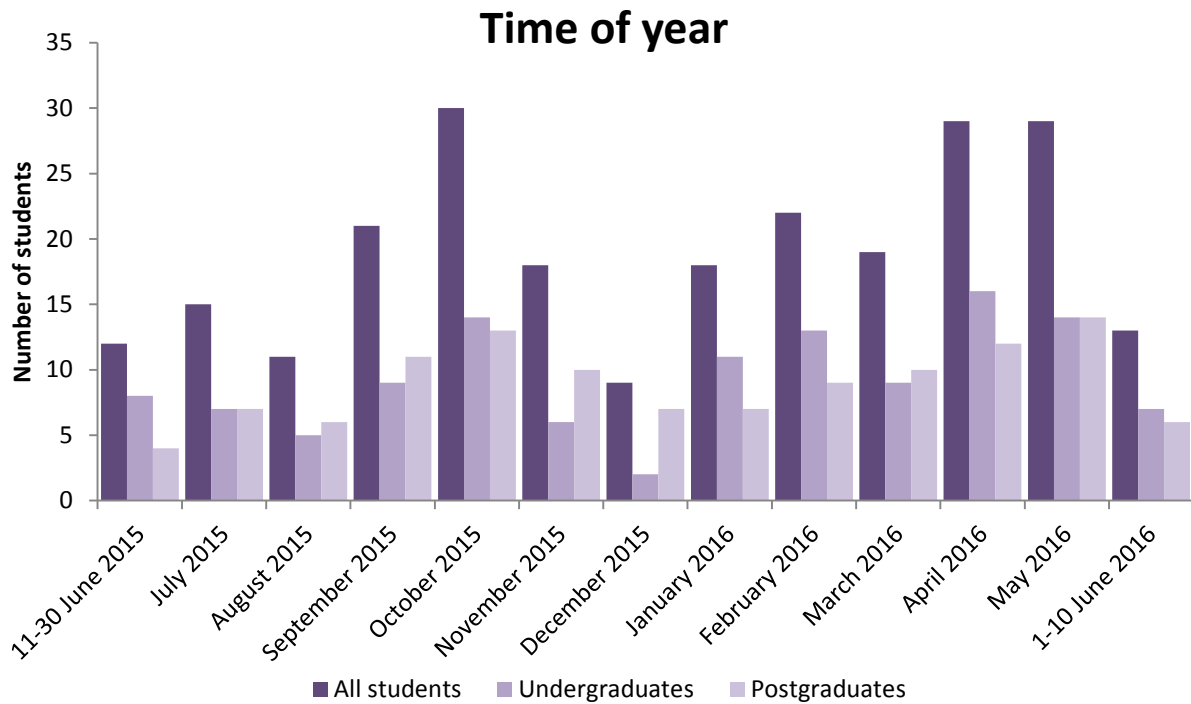


Graph 2- Service user cases worked on by full-time staff and sabbatical officers

B. CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

TIMES OF YEAR

The Students' Unions' Advice Service is open throughout the year, and can be accessed by students at any time – including outside of academic term time. There are, however, certain trends that can be identified by analysing at what point in the year students access the Service.



Graph 3 – Number of students by month of reporting year

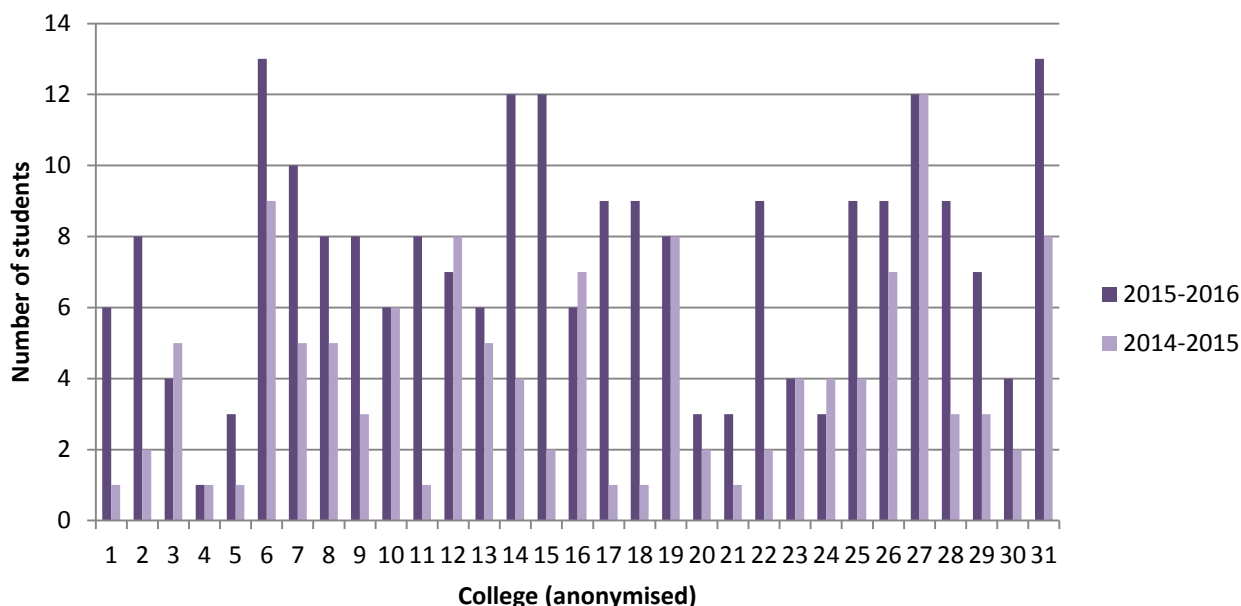
Graph 3 demonstrates what may be described as peaks and troughs throughout the year, with ‘high’ periods between September – November, February and April and May. These peaks correspond to the academic term times: Michaelmas Term ran from the 6th October – 4th December 2015 and had 43 students, Lent Term ran from the 12th January – 11th March 2016 and had 44 students, and Easter Term ran from the 19th April – 10th June 2016 and had 61 students. These ‘high’ periods may be due to the fact that more students are in Cambridge itself and so, are more likely to drop-in or be made aware of the Service via publicity; alternatively, it may reflect that issues requiring the assistance of the Service are more likely to arise during term time. The Service also witnessed a peak in July – outside of term time – which may correlate with issues regarding exam results and allowances, since July is the period of time when results are confirmed via CamSIS.

This year, the Service has attempted to target its promotion at these peak times, with publicity drives and events staged at the beginning of Michaelmas Term and in Easter Term, when undergraduates are taking exams.

COLLEGE

In the 2015/16 cycle, the Advice Service supported students from all Colleges, with an additional 15 students whose College was undeclared and 2 where College information was not applicable (*Graph 4*). As expected, the number of students accessing the Service from each College varies. This may be because of a variety of causes, but may include the relative size of the College population, the prominence and accessibility of the Advice Service publicity around the College and accommodation, and the strength of referral links the Service has with the pastoral and tutorial systems at the College.

We have noticed that these factors change on a yearly basis. Last year’s report noted that there has historically been a well-evidenced trend for the Colleges of sabbatical officers to be over-represented due to the relationships maintained between officers and their student body. This year, however, this effect appears to be marginal, if not non-existent, and the greatest increases in student access to the Service have been in Colleges which are not the *alma mater* of current sabbatical officers.



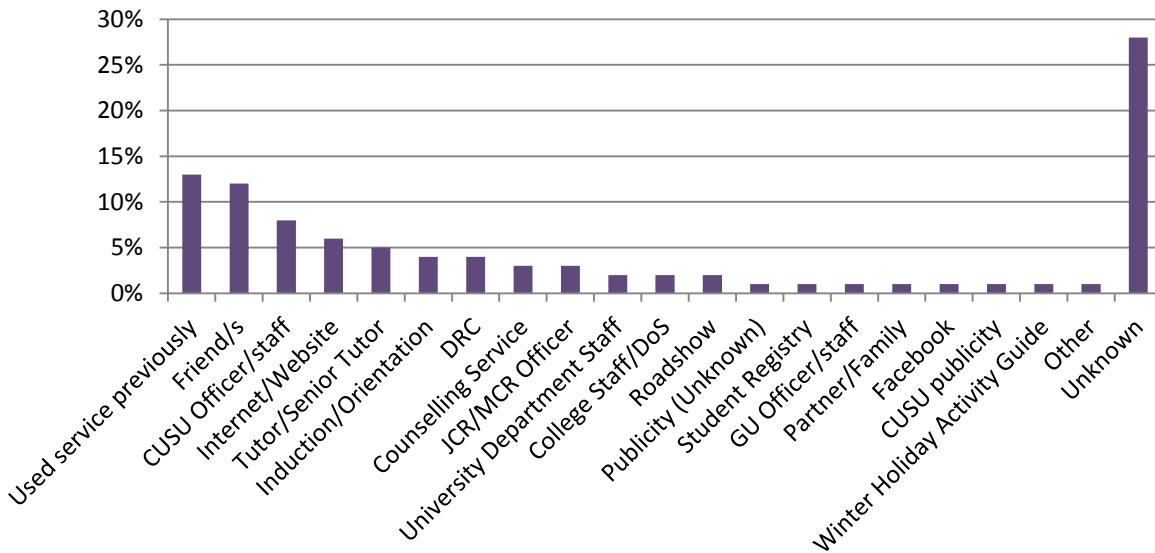
Graph 4 – Number of students accessing SUAS by College

The variability of students approaching the Service within a given year, as well as over several years, should not be taken as an indication of effectiveness or quality of support offered within different Colleges. It is important to note, however, that the number of students accessing the Service has increased for almost every College since last year. This may be due to increased publicity material and referrals within the College, or the wider efforts of promotion that the Service has been engaging with this year – including visits to lecture sites and tutorial lunches.

METHOD OF REFERRAL

Of the 246 students who accessed the Service this year, 70 did not disclose where or how they were referred to the Service. Of the 176 who did disclose, those who had used the Service before (32 students) and those referred by friends (30 students) were the most likely methods of referral. CUSU publicity, social media promotion and SUAS roadshows featured very little.

Source of Referral (Students)



Graph 5 – Breakdown of method of referral for students

GENDER

Similar to last year, the Advice Service continues to be used more regularly by disclosed female students compared to disclosed male students (Table 3). This corresponds to wider sector trends which signal lower engagement in pastoral and academic support services by male students, which in turn reflect social norms and expectations. Understanding the specific relationship between the types of issues brought to the Service and the gender of the service user may allow a greater understanding of how to target publicity material of the Service to certain demographics.

The large number of students whose gender is undisclosed (89 for the 2015/16 cycle) arises from the fact that data is recorded based on how students declare their gender. If a casework form is not received, for example, or if the case is short-lived (such as some of those under the ‘Information’ category), or if users communicate entirely by e-mail, then a gender may not be registered. The Service does not assume a user’s gender if it has not been explicitly declared.

All students	Number	Percentage
Female	96	39%
Male	61	25%
Undisclosed	89	36%
Total	248	100%

Table 3 – Students accessing the Service by gender

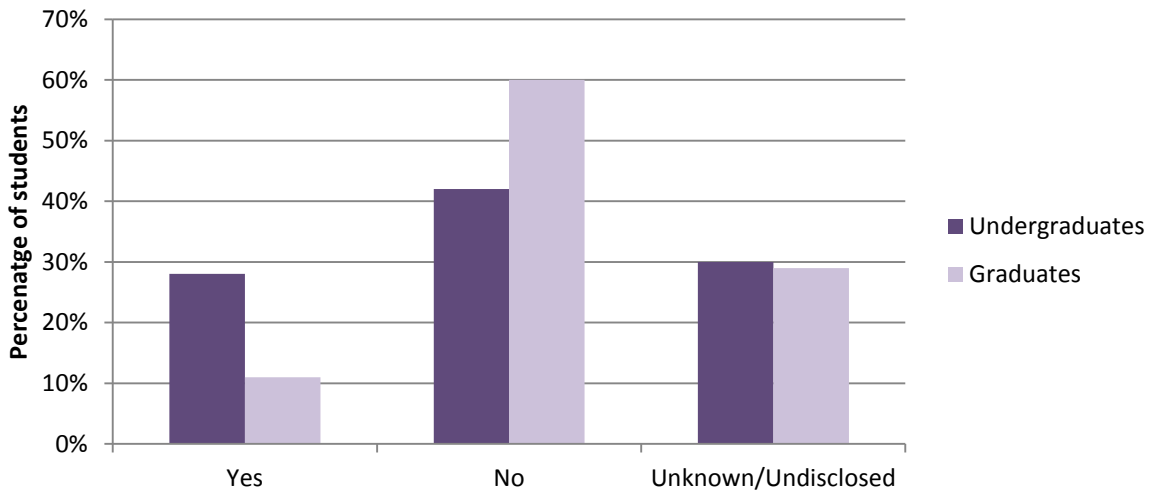
DISABILITY

Of the 246 students accessing the Service this year, 47 disclosed a disability via the casework form, 121 declared that they did not have a disability and 78 did not disclose either yes or no (Graph 6). As is to be expected with a larger number of undergraduates using the Service, more undergraduates declared having a disability.

It is interesting to note that our figures for students whose concerns were about mental health are greater than our figures for students who disclosed a disability to the Service. This implies that students with mental health conditions may not identify themselves as disabled, and/or that students with mental health concerns may not have official diagnoses.

The Students’ Unions’ Advice Service has close links with the Disability Resource Centre within the University, and has taken part in several welcome and welfare events for students with disabilities this year. It is also worth noting that the Cambridge University Students’ Union held a referendum in 2016 as to whether there should be a full-time Disabled Students’ Officer on the sabbatical team. The referendum passed with a large majority, and the Service looks forward to seeing how issues for disabled students become more prominent not only within CUSU, but also within the Advice Service.

Student Service User breakdown by disability

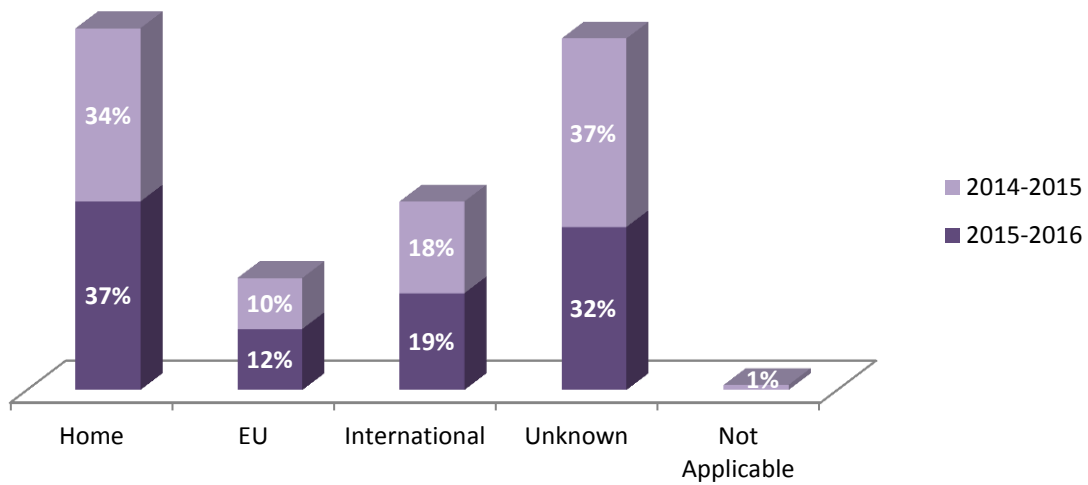


Graph 6 –Percentage of students accessing the Service by disclosed disability

FEE STATUS

In line with the increased number of students in the 2015/16 cycle, there was also an increase in the number of Home (+34), EU (+12) and International (+18) students (Graph 7). We know from previous years that the Service has a lower number of EU and International students accessing the Service, which may be because of a range of reasons including cultural or social beliefs, lack of awareness of the Service or a weaker relationship with the tutorial referral system – but this year’s increase is a positive note. At an Advice Service Away Day this year, it was suggested that the Service run welcome events during International Freshers’ Week in September 2016 when international and EU students arrive in Cambridge a week or so before home students. This may help those students become aware of the Service, where it is located, and what it offers.

Fee status of students



Graph 7 – Fee status of students

STUDENT STATUS

The Service continues to support students across a wide range of subjects and degrees (Table 4). There was an almost equal number of undergraduate and postgraduate users this year, with 121 undergraduates and 116 postgraduates accessing the Service. Of course, the category of ‘postgraduate’ is not homogenous, and within it, encapsulates PhD students, MPhil, MLitt, MBA, MSt, MEd, LLM and Graduate Medicine students. Within these sub-categories, usage of the Service varies dramatically. 49% of our student users this year were undergraduates (compared to 48% last year), while 10% were studying for an MPhil and 33% were studying for a PhD (up from 26% of service users last year).

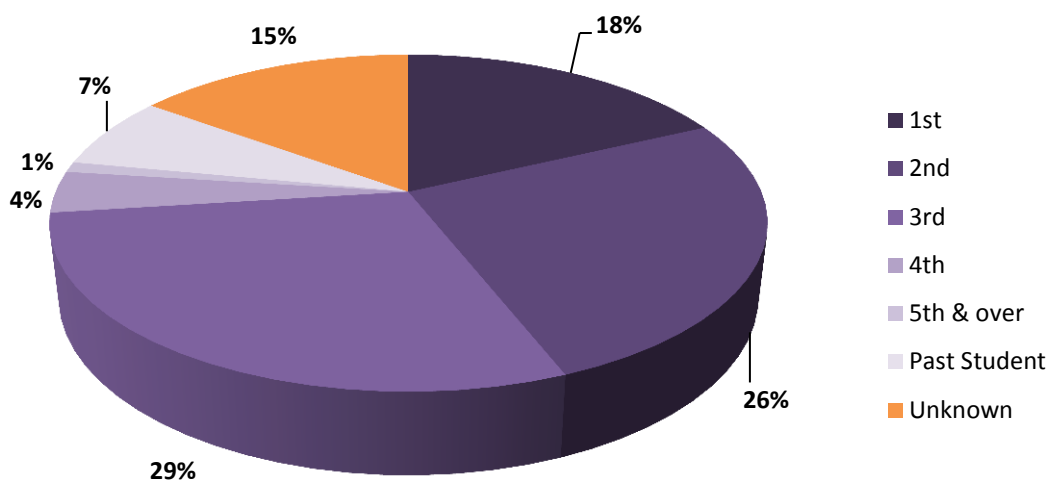
Student Status	Number	Percentage
Undergraduate	121	49%
PhD	81	33%
MPhil	24	10%
Other Graduate	11	4%
Unknown	7	3%
Other	2	1%
Total	248	100%

Table 4 – Student users by their student status

YEAR OF STUDY

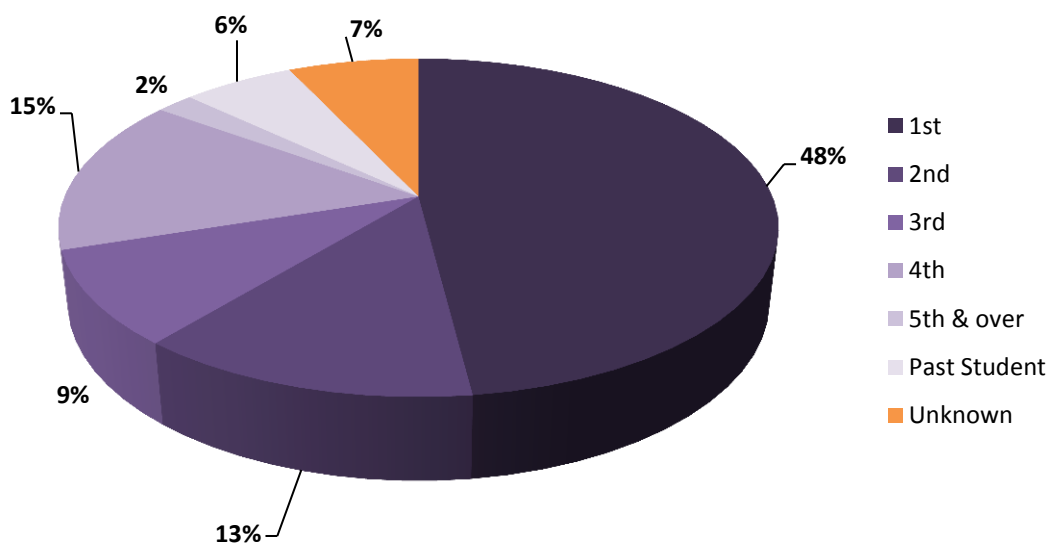
In a similar trend to last year, students in their undergraduate third year were the most likely to access the Service (29% of undergraduate users), while 26% of undergraduate users were in their 2nd year. This may be because of specific issues that arise in final year, such as exam and dissertation concerns or career queries. Among postgraduates, those in their first year of study were once again the most likely to approach the Service (48% of postgraduate users, which is an increase from last year where first year postgraduates made up 36% of students). The main issues of concern for Postgraduates are from PhD students having difficulties with their relationship with their supervisor and passing PhD registration.

Undergraduate Students



Graph 8 – Undergraduate student users by year of study

Postgraduate Students



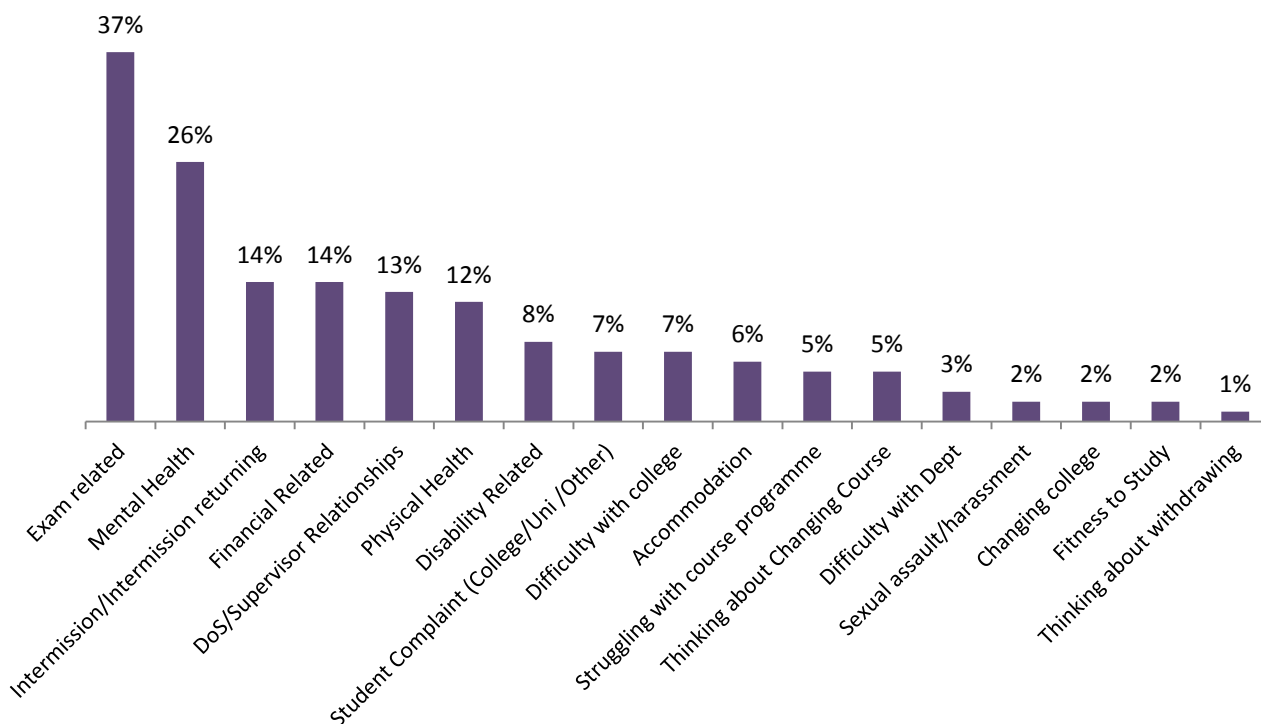
Graph 9 – Postgraduate student users by year of study

C. TYPES OF ISSUES

The Service has assisted students on a number of issues this year, ranging from exam concerns to accommodation problems to issues of sexual harassment and assault. The most common issues recorded during this period (measured as the percentage of students approaching the Service who experienced that particular issue) were:

- Exam related: 37%
- Mental Health: 26%
- Intermission/Intermission returning: 14%
- Finance-related issues: 14%
- DoS/Supervisor Relationships: 13%
- Physical Health: 12%
- Disability Related: 8%

Key Issues for students

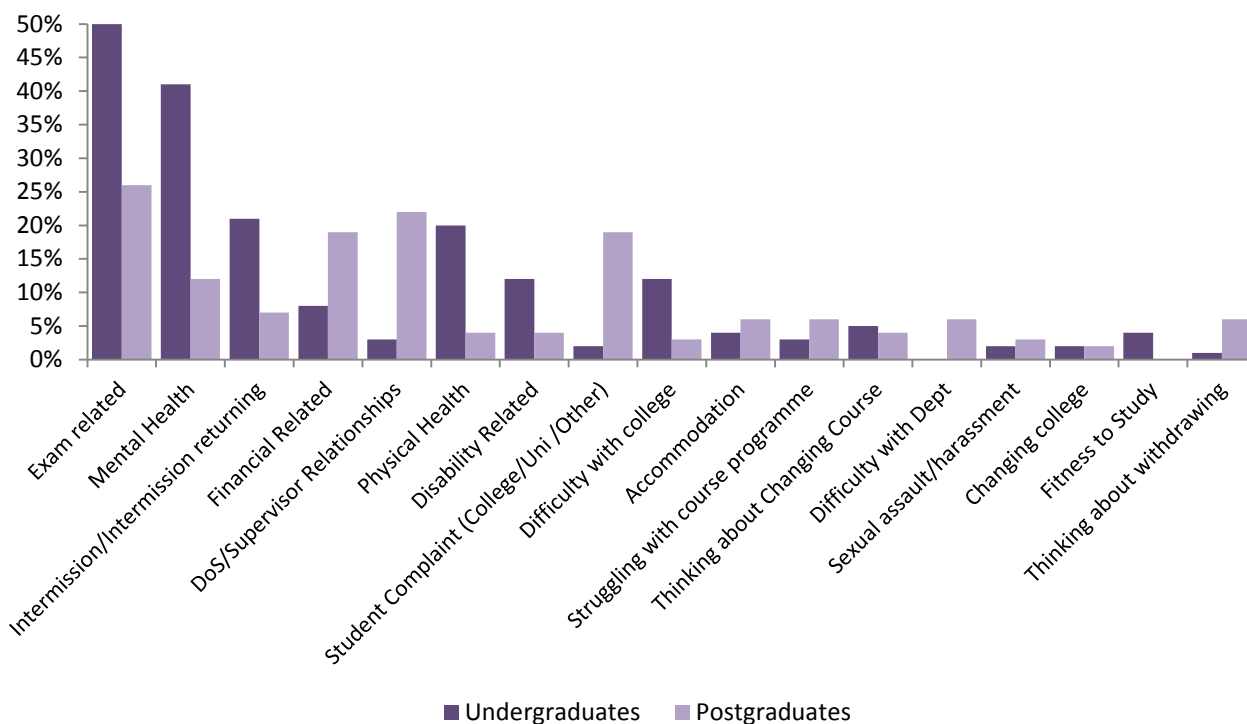


Graph 10 - Key issues for students during the 2015-2016 cycle

Although student cases may fall into a distinct category, it should also be noted that a single case may include multiple issues. For example, a student approaching the Service to discuss exam concerns may also seek support on an issue such as intermission or a disability or academic support.

As Graph 10 demonstrates the most frequently-occurring issues this year are broadly similar to those encountered during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 academic years. Exam-related concerns (37% of cases – 4% increase from last year) and mental health issues (26%) were the most common during that year, whilst intermitting (14%) and general physical health (12%) also featured highly. Finance-related issues decreased from 17% in 2014-15 to 14% in 2015-16, whereas issues with Director of Studies or Supervisor relationships increased from 9% in 2014-15 to 13% in this cycle.

Key Issues by student type



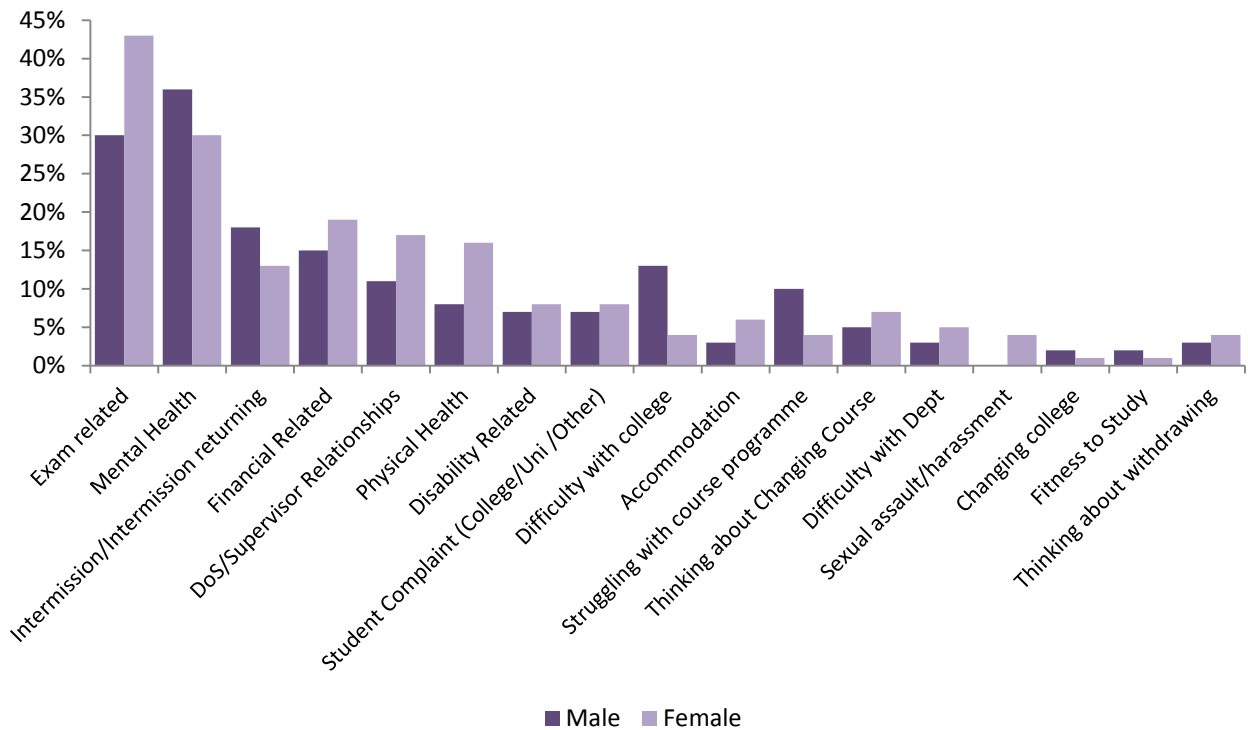
Graph 11 - Key issues by student type

Graduate and undergraduate students using the Service tend to access the Service for very different reasons and concerns (Graph 11). In a continuing trend from last year, the most common issues brought by undergraduates were mental health and exam-related issues (such as exam allowances); graduate students were also most likely to come to the Service with exam-related concerns, course concerns and accommodation issues. It is important to note that 50% of undergraduate cases this year were regarding exam-related issues. As with last year, graduate students were also more likely than undergraduates to approach the Service with difficulties with a supervisor or their department, and student complaints, while undergraduates were more likely to raise intermission and issues with their physical health.

Different issue profiles were also exhibited by those who disclosed themselves as male or female (Graph 12). In contrast to last year, when male students were much more likely to raise exam-related concerns than females, this year female students were over 10% more likely to bring exam-related issues to the Service. Men were, however, 6% more likely to bring issues about mental health to the Service; proportionally, mental health issues are the most common issue for men to bring to the Service. The greater number of females using the service may account for this disparity, but it may also suggest some gender-specific issues.

This year, there were four issues which men brought to the Service more than women: mental health, returning from intermission, difficulty with College and struggling with their course.

Key Issues by gender



Graph 12 - Key issues for students by gender

D. ISSUE SPOTLIGHTS

One of the advantages of having sabbatical officers working within the Advice Service is that, by working directly with students and taking part in reflective practice where all of the Service’s ongoing student cases are discussed, they gain firsthand knowledge of the issues that affect students who seek support from the Advice Service.

Though the Advice Service is an impartial service that does not make value judgements, CUSU and the Graduate Union Officers can use the knowledge they’ve gained working within the Advice Service to inform their campaigns, activities and committee work.

This year and for the first time, we have decided to spotlight some of the issues where officers have been able to use the knowledge they’ve gained working within the Advice Service to inform the work they have undertaken outside of the Advice Service in their capacity as elected student representatives.

SPOTLIGHT ON...EXAMS

As in previous years, exams represented a significant area of work for the Advice Service in 2015-16. In the 2014-2015 reporting period, exams represented 33% of the Service's work. In this reporting period, they represent 37%. The work we undertake includes exam access arrangements, examination allowances, and reviews of results.

Examinations have been a significant area of work for CUSU this academic year. This year the CUSU Education Officer attended four meetings of the Board of Exams, and three meetings of the Examination Review Working Group. Being able to attend these meetings with the knowledge of how the exam system works allows elected officers to contribute effectively to discussions about how exam processes and policies can be improved. The CUSU Education Officer has also worked closely with the Student Registry outside of these meetings to develop the information provided to students in advance of exams. Furthermore, the Advice Service annual report for 2014-15 was formally received by the Board of Exams earlier this year, and we hope that this will continue in future years.

This year we have considered in further detail the academic year of the students we have supported with their examinations. These statistics show that the majority of exam-related cases were brought by undergraduates mainly in their 2nd or 3rd year, although one-third of cases were brought by graduate students, generally those in their 1st year. It is clear from these statistics that exams are an area where we support students in all years of their studies.

Student	Undergraduates		Graduates	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1st year	8	13%	13	43%
2nd year	17	28%	6	20%
3rd year	18	30%	2	6%
4th year	3	5%	5	17%
5th year & over	1	2%	1	3%
Past	6	10%	2	7%
Unknown	8	13%	1	3%
Total	61	100%	30	100%

Table 5 – Student exam related users by year

Of the 91 students we supported on exam related issues, just under a quarter of these students disclosed a disability to us. Disabilities disclosed included specific learning difficulty such as dyspraxia or dyslexia, and mental health conditions and long standing illness or physical health conditions. It is important to note that not all students with a mental health condition have disclosed this as a disability.

In addition to this, the Service has worked with students across a broad range of subject disciplines. We have recorded 18 subject disciplines at undergraduate level and 22 subject disciplines at graduate level. The fact that students from a range of academic disciplines approached the Service to discuss examinations shows the importance of working closely with Faculties and Departments, to ensure that they are aware of the Service and the ways it can support students.

SPOTLIGHT ON...MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health represented the second largest number of cases this year, with 26% of the students we worked with approaching the Service to discuss mental health. Of those students who declared their mental health condition and gave us details of this, the greatest number was for depression. We also supported students who disclosed anxiety, bereavement, bi-polar, eating disorder, OCD and PTSD.

CUSU and the Graduate Union recognise student mental health as an area of incredibly important work. The 2015 Big Cambridge Survey showed that 45% of respondents indicated that Cambridge had had a negative impact on their mental health. This year, the CUSU-GU Welfare & Rights Officer has sought to curb the decline of student mental health by combating the following potential triggers that may present themselves in the Cambridge environment: discrimination and oppression, isolation, and the habit of holding oneself to unrealistic standards in a high pressure environment.

CUSU and the GU have worked hard to tackle discrimination and oppression. The Senior Tutors' Standing Committee on Welfare and Finance has given its endorsement to a requirement for all College websites to include up-to-date accessibility information. The CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer has, in collaboration with CUSU's Autonomous Campaigns, created an Access Checklist which is hosted on the CUSU website and promoted for student usage at all events. This is intended to support those organising events to ensure that their events are accessible to all. CUSU and the Graduate Union have also held events including Yoga and careers workshops specifically for those who often find events like these inaccessible.

To tackle isolation, CUSU and the GU have hosted large-scale welfare events (such as the Big Chill in May 2016), have facilitated Welfare Officers to put on accessible events (such as Meet the Animals), and have fostered the growth of various student-run support groups. The CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer is currently seeking to secure funding for these groups to make sure that they stay established in the future. Further projects have included the Winter Holiday Activity Guide, the GU's Saturday Screenings and weekly Parent-Toddler Coffee Mornings. To counter both isolation but also the impact of the high pressure environment, which can lead students to hold themselves to unrealistic standards, the CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer has sought to provide Tutors with signposting information to direct incoming students to student-led support and solidarity groups. CUSU and the GU have provided ready-made campaigns on self-love to JCR/MCR Welfare Officers to run in their College's without large amounts of preparation required. The CUSU sabbatical officers have also worked together over the course of the year to campaign for the abolition of inter-Collegiate rankings tables, and of Public Class-Lists.

SPOTLIGHT ON...RELATIONS WITH SUPERVISOR

This year, 11% of the students supported by the Advice Service were graduate students who came to the Service because of their relationship with their supervisor. Our annual reports over the last two years have noted that graduate students are more likely to approach the Service to discuss their relationship with their supervisor while undergraduate students are more likely to approach the Service to discuss their relationship with the Director of Studies or a supervisor.

This year's data for cases in this reporting category show that, at 61%, female students represent the majority of those we have worked with on this issue in this period. Issues with a supervisor affected

students of all nationality. There was no evidence to suggest that students of a particular nationality were more likely to experience difficulties with their supervisor.

Alongside the work done by the Advice Service to support individual students with managing their relationship with their supervisor, the Graduate Union hosted a workshop run by the University Counselling Service on 'managing the relationship with your supervisor' in April 2016. In addition to this, CUSU held the third set of Student-Led Teaching Awards, which served to highlight good practice in teaching and student support. CUSU has also continued to campaign for better training for academic and pastoral staff. Again this year the CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer and the Advice Service Manager contributed to the annual training event for new College Tutors. CUSU and the Graduate Union have also launched an accessible education campaign, which seeks to raise awareness of the need to teach inclusively, with an accompanying booklet that highlights recommended good practice in this regard.

SPOTLIGHT ON...CHANGING COLLEGE

Last year's annual report noted that navigating the current procedure for a student to change College has proven challenging, and has led to some casework that has involved a high level of commitment and intensity. This year we continued to support students who were seeking to change College. The reasons these students gave for wanting to change College were varied.

In addition to supporting these students, this year the Advice Service was asked to be part of a working group which was seeking to develop a new inter-Collegiate process and policy for changing College. This was alongside separate CUSU-GU representation on the working group. The Advice Service was asked to contribute to this discussion because of our extensive experience of supporting students with these cases. We are hopeful that a clearer and more transparent process for changing College can be instituted, and believe that the experience of supporting students with this issue in the Advice Service allowed us to offer useful insight on limitations with the current approach, and most importantly to suggest ideas that we felt could work for a new approach.

SPOTLIGHT ON...ACCOMMODATION RIGHTS

During the reporting period, 6% of the students that the Advice Service supported had approached the Service to discuss their accommodation. Though the Advice Service would mainly refer students who are searching for accommodation or needing advice on how to deal with landlords to the Accommodation Service, the Advice Service does work with students who are experiencing difficulties with their College accommodation.

Although students are supported in this regard through the Advice Service and the Accommodation Service, accommodation rights have also been a key area of work for CUSU this year. The 2015 Big Cambridge Survey showed that only half of the students who live in College were satisfied with the value for money their accommodation represented. This year CUSU has run three rent workshops - which are designed to brief students and student representatives on their rights in terms of rent and accommodation, and to equip them to be effective in undertaking rent negotiations with their College. The CUSU President has also

created a Rent and Accommodation Rights Guide to support JCR and MCR committees with this issue. The CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer has also identified that accommodation has been an issue for intermitting students in terms of organising for their return to College, and has sought to address this through her work on the guidelines for intermission and supporting intermitting students.

SPOTLIGHT ON...INTERMISSION

This year, intermission and returning from intermission represented the third largest number of cases handled by the Advice Service (14% of the students we supported approached the Service with this issue). Of the students we supported with intermission issues, 23% specifically required support with returning from intermission, and the majority of these students were in their 2nd or 3rd year of study. The Advice Service has also continued to work closely and effectively with the Applications Committee. This has included attending a meeting to discuss areas of shared interest, and close work throughout the year with the Secretary of the Applications Committee.

In addition to supporting individual student cases, intermission has been an important area of work for CUSU this year. We have also undertaken discussions about how students who experience a late diagnosis are supported by the University. The CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer is currently working with the support of the Secretary of the Applications Committee and the Secretary of the Board of Exams to produce a plan to address this issue. The Welfare and Rights Officer is also working with the Senior Tutors' Standing Committee on Welfare and Finance to produce clear guidelines on intermission.

6. LINKS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

A. WORDS FROM OUR PARTNERS

CUSU - PARENT ORGANISATION

This year, the CUSU sabbatical officer team 2015-16 had the privilege of feeding into the Students' Unions' Advice Service rebrand and we could not be more encouraged and inspired by the work of the Advice Service team throughout the year. From its founding, the Advice Service has provided comprehensive support for Cambridge students, and its uniqueness lies in the ability of the team to offer a rich and diverse advisory support service not limited to any particular area of student life.

This year, we sought to highlight to students just how diverse a role the Advice Service could play in their Cambridge experience, and the 48% increase in student engagement is testament to the incredible commitment of the students' unions and the Advice Service team. CUSU and the Graduate Union are becoming more central to student life at Cambridge, and as engagement with the unions grow, the positive, lifelong impact of the Advice Service grows, too.

The students' unions have seen positive changes this year, namely the co-location of the unions at a central University location (17 Mill Lane) alongside the merging of service provision for students. It is clear that the improved accessibility and subsequent visibility of the Students' Unions' Advice Service has had a positive impact on engagement levels. In addition, the dedication of the team through the 'SUAS roadshows' around the University confirms the ability of the Advice Service to effectively navigate the complex structure of our institution and make sure that students understand all of their options within it.

This report highlights that the impact and expertise of the Advice Service is growing. Now firmly positioned as a key stakeholder in the realm of student life and welfare, the next year will provide the Service with new opportunities to engage, serve and collaborate with students across Cambridge. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to watch the Students' Unions' Advice Service team grow, develop and continue to provide excellent services; CUSU remains extremely proud of the Service and its contribution to Collegiate Cambridge.

Priscilla Mensah (CUSU President 2015-16)

GRADUATE UNION - PARENT ORGANISATION

The Graduate Union is rightly very proud of the Students' Unions Advice Service. Graduate student casework is at the core of the GU's mission, and we could not ask for a more effective, professional and personally dedicated team to carry out this vital component of our work. I am particularly impressed with the importance the Advice Service team place on expanding both their reach, successfully seeking to engage with ever more students each year, and the breadth of their expertise, this year developing a capability to give money advice through membership of the National Association of Student Money Advisers.

The data presented in this annual report clearly demonstrates the understanding the Advice Service has for the diverse issues particularly relevant to the graduate student body. From difficulty with supervisors, to supporting student parents, the Advice Service team – including both our professional advisors, as well as

the student advice officers – never fail to show respect and understanding for the complexities graduate study can entail.

This year, the Graduate Union Offices in Mill Lane have expanded to become the CUSU/GU Offices – which also now encompass the permanent home of the Advice Service, including a new consultation room. With this proximity has naturally evolved a much closer and – we feel – more productive working relationship between the Graduate Union and our colleagues at the Advice Service and CUSU. As the Graduate Union continues to strengthen and expand in the coming year, we look forward to exploring ways in which the GU can support the Students’ Unions’ Advice Service beyond the financial support we offer at present; the introduction of a second full-time graduate sabbatical officer will no doubt afford opportunities to contribute more practically to the Advice Service’s future successes.

Chad Allen (Graduate Union President 2015-16)

SENIOR TUTOR AND ASSOCIATE SECRETARY OF SENIOR TUTORS’ COMMITTEE (WELFARE)

In a very short time (in Cambridge terms!) the Advice Service has established itself as an important component of the range of welfare services available to our students, and its growing role is demonstrated by the fact that it has seen 48% more students this year. The continuity and professionalism of its service, underpinned as it is by permanent paid staff, forms a solid basis for the input of sabbatical officers who bring their fresh student experience to the Service as a whole.

The Advice Service is as effective as it is because its advisers understand how the various parts of the collegiate university intersect, and they work collaboratively to achieve the best outcome for the student. I’m always pleased to hear that one of the first questions advisers ask a student is ‘Have you talked to your Tutor?’ This is not because I think that College Tutors always have the right answers, but because the question demonstrates that the Advice Service does not exist to undermine the tutorial system but to complement it. Yet it is also important that the Advice Service does stand slightly apart from College support in order to offer that second opinion, independent advice, or voice of a ‘critical friend’ that students might need in order to reach a decision on the way forward in their particular situation. The Advice Service has played this role very effectively for Colleges themselves, helping us to see ourselves as others see us – an essential function, and one that helps us all improve welfare provision for our students.

Jane McLarty (Senior Tutor at Wolfson College and Associate Secretary of Senior Tutors’ Committee)

B. CUSU AND THE GRADUATE UNION

The Students’ Unions’ Advice Service is provided by CUSU and the Graduate Union. Both organisations provide financial and staff resources that allow for the Service’s continued operation. The Students’ Unions’ Advice Service remains one of the key services provided to members by either Union and as such is central to their strategic development.

C. OTHER STUDENT SERVICES

Working effectively with other University services is key to the way the Students' Unions' Advice Service operates, and the team works closely with other services throughout the year, whether in making or receiving referrals, seeking advice and information, or working alongside various support services when supporting a student through a difficulty.

The Service prides itself on its expertise in what services are available to Cambridge students. The team's knowledge of the services on offer to students in the Collegiate University, locally and nationally, allows us to see students with any issue. Advice Officers recognise the limits of what they are able to offer a student, and as such we are experts at signposting and referrals. Cases often involve discussing multiple referral options with the student to help them identify what might be most appropriate for them. To support this aspect of the Service, every summer, the Advice Service team meets other key service-providers in the Collegiate University such as the Counselling Service, Mental Health Advisors, Disability Resource Centre, College Nurses, Careers Service, Childcare Office, International Students Team, Accommodation Service, Language Centre, and Student Registry.

D. APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE

The Students' Unions' Advice Service attends Applications Committee meetings ones or twice a year. These meetings allow Advice Officers to discuss with the committee members some of the challenges that students face when navigating the University procedures as well as some of the challenges that the Service faces in advising students.

Members of the Advice Service team are also in regular contact with the Secretary of the Applications Committee to ensure that we have a clear understanding of the relevant procedures and regulations and that we are up to date with any changes that might affect students.

This year, the Advice Service shared with the committee some of the challenges a few of our service-users have faced when they have received a diagnosis for a health condition or disability *after* their exams. One element of this problem is the substantial periods of time that many students have to face before receiving an appointment (which would be required for a diagnostic assessment to be made) with local NHS Services, for example students with ADHD. As a result of this, the CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer is currently working with the support of the Secretary of the Applications Committee and the Secretary of the Board of Exams to produce a plan to address this issue.

We also raised an issue that had affected several of our service-users who experienced delays in receiving the outcome of their application to the Applications Committee from their College. It was agreed that the Applications Committee would henceforth email a student to inform them that their application had been processed and sent to the College. This would then allow the student to follow-up with the College if need be.

E. COLLEGES

The Students' Unions' Advice Service is always keen to further develop and cement its relationship with the Colleges. In October 2015, the Service contributed for a second time to the Tutor training programme. This was a great opportunity to build relationships with College tutorial teams, and to raise awareness of the Service amongst tutors. We look forward to our continued involvement in tutor training.

Furthermore, the Advice Service Manager has continued visiting Colleges to meet Senior Tutors and their Tutorial teams. This year, the Advice Service Manager was warmly welcomed by 12 Colleges. It is felt that this will be successful both in building relationships and finding out more about specific support systems and services available in each College. This allows Advice Officers to more effectively support students, especially in terms of helping them access the support that is available to them in their College. The Service is also keen to maintain links with other College services, e.g. attending meetings of the College Nurses Association during the year.

This year, the Advice Service was invited to contribute to discussions regarding the review of the guidelines for changing College. With our extensive experience of supporting students with this issue, we feel that we were able to make a valuable contribution to the discussion and look forward to a new inter-Collegiate process and policy for changing College being in place soon.

F. SCHOOLS

This year, the Advice Service was keen to build relationships with University staff who work with students. By making contact with the Schools of the University, we were able to get a sense of how the Schools were organised and how we may best be able to raise awareness about the Advice Service to their staff members.

We were welcomed by several of the Schools (with hopefully more to come!), and it was interesting to see how different Schools favoured different approaches. In some cases we delivered presentations about the Advice Service to staff while others were more interested in written materials regarding the Advice Service that they could share with their students and staff and use in student handbooks and webpages. Most requested both. A couple of Schools also requested basic student support training for their administrators who work closely with students, which we provided on three occasions so far. The uptake for the training sessions was high and waiting lists had to be created. More are planned in the future to meet demand. The feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive and staff seem to enjoy having the opportunity to think about boundaries and confidentiality and how these apply to their role as well as learning about active listening and making quality referrals. Furthermore, they seem to value the opportunity to discuss their experiences with students in a supportive atmosphere with other colleagues in similar roles.

We were touched by the enthusiasm that some of our colleagues in the Schools had for the Advice Service, and we look forward to continuing to work with them and other Schools in the future.

G. NATIONAL ADVICE COMMUNITY

The Students' Unions' Advice Service remains a member of Advice UK (the UK's largest support network for free, independent advice centres), which allows the Service access to their training and resources, as well as their professional liability insurance. The Service is also a member of AMOSSHE (the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education), RAWs (Research and Welfare Staff in Student Unions), and more recently NASMA (National Association of Student Money Advisers) and has benefitted from the access to training, resources and advice that membership of these organisations afford.

The Service continues to foster strong relationships with other Advice Services locally and nationally, including Anglia Ruskin University and the University of East Anglia.

H. STUDENT-LED WELFARE INITIATIVES

Strong peer support networks are a feature of the Collegiate University and something which the Students' Unions' Advice Service plays a vital role in supporting. In turn, volunteers in these networks are a vital source of referrals and awareness-raising for the Service.

This year the Service took a lead role in further developing and providing training for JCR and MCR committee members with support-related roles, Autonomous Campaigns, as well as to Peer2Peer volunteers and other welfare-related initiatives. We have also worked more closely with Linkline this year, collaborating on projects such as coasters for College bars which provide information about Linkline, the Students' Unions' Advice Service and the Samaritans.

In bringing together professional support staff and student representatives who have typically worked within one or more of these schemes, the Service is uniquely placed to provide training tailored to the needs of these volunteer groups.

By helping student volunteers to develop a set of 'core skills' for student support, such as active listening, signposting/referrals, establishing boundaries and maintaining confidentiality, the Service helps to improve the quality of support provided to students and reduce the incidence of student volunteers acting inappropriately in their roles. These core skills are supplemented by issue-based training on specific topics such as mental health, disability or reducing the risk of student suicide, which improve students' awareness and improve confidence in dealing with more difficult issues that they might be approached with. Additional training can be provided on request, for example in the case of a student death.

The Service further supports these networks by providing a confidential source of advice and support for volunteers who are worried about a particular student or situation. Issues such as students experiencing suicidal thoughts, eating disorders or self-harm are common as the Service supports officers in deciding when it may or may not be appropriate to breach confidentiality. This support offering is a separate but parallel service to that offered to the general student population. The separate service allows the Advice Service team to be slightly more directive, for example in setting clear boundaries about the volunteer's role and advising when situations are inappropriate for them to be dealing with.

This year, the Advice Service was invited to contribute resources to the Student Support Officer Handbook, which was created by the Welfare and Rights Officer for these student volunteers. These include for

example a template confidentiality policy for Officers to employ, which is based on the Service's own confidentiality policy.

The Advice Service has also been involved in producing the Winter Holiday Activity Guide and supported student volunteers to host events for students remaining in Cambridge over the winter holidays, culminating in various events taking place such as film screenings and board game evenings as well as a potluck event at St Edmund's on Christmas Day.

7. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

A. NEW NAME AND BRANDING

This year, the Advice Service team thought carefully about how we could increase awareness about the Advice Service. We showed our publicity to students who had never used or heard of the Advice Service and asked them what they thought the Service was and who it was for. We found that many students did not recognise that the Advice Service was part of the University of Cambridge and existed specifically for Cambridge students. This seemed to be mainly due to the name of the Service (Student Advice Service) which did not appear to connect it to any particular University.

We then worked with CUSU Officers who indicated that the text on our publicity was vague and that it would be helpful if we defined more precisely the areas of advice we can provide. CUSU Officers also felt that the branding had a corporate feel and wondered whether now that the Advice Service was firmly established as a credible and professional service the look could be more student friendly.

This feedback culminated in a change in the name of the Advice Service from “Student Advice Service” to “Students’ Unions’ Advice Service” as well as a rebranding of the Service.

Having visited several other advice centres and surveyed colleagues, we were aware that other services have used Students’ Union as part of their title and we felt that if we did the same, it might help Cambridge students make the connection that the Advice Service is provided by their students’ unions and therefore exists specifically for them.



The Advice Service's rebranded leaflet

B. SHARED PREMISES WITH CUSU AND THE GRADUATE UNION

This year, CUSU moved to 17 Mill Lane, where CUSU and the Graduate Union are accommodated in the same building. The Advice Service is therefore now located in one place which has removed the logistical issues involved with staff moving between sites. The consolidation of resources and associated stronger presence of the two Students' Unions has already resulted in better physical access to the Students' Unions' Advice Service and this has no doubt contributed in part to our increase in student numbers this year.

The move also generated an opportunity for us to create a lovely new casework room where students can continue to be seen confidentially and in a comfortable setting.



Another way in which the move has benefitted the Advice Service is how easily the Service and CUSU Welfare can now integrate with one another. Students who come into CUSU for sexual health supplies or affordable sanitary products may now also note that there is an Advice Service that they can access. And if a Welfare Officer is visiting CUSU to collect welfare supplies in bulk, this also gives them the opportunity to easily drop by the Service to discuss any students they may be concerned about and to seek advice on how best to support them, and to collect leaflets and posters to display within their College..

C. CONTRIBUTION TO UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

This year the Advice Service was asked to be part of a working group which was seeking to develop a new inter-Collegiate process and policy for changing College. This was alongside separate CUSU-GU representation on the working group. The Advice Service was asked to contribute to this discussion because of our extensive experience of supporting students with these cases. We are hopeful that a clearer and more transparent process for changing College can be instituted, and believe that the experience of supporting students with this issue in the Advice Service allowed us to offer useful ideas for a new approach.

The Advice Service was also invited to contribute to discussions regarding mediation for students, alongside separate CUSU-GU representation on the working group. It is with much enthusiasm that we welcome students being able to access the University's current mediation service and we look forward to the possibility of contributing staff-time in order to increase the number of staff trained in and able to conduct mediation.

At an Applications Committee meeting, we raised with the committee the fact that over the years some of our service users experienced difficulty in accessing the outcome of their application to the Applications Committee – this was sometimes due to a delay within the College. The Applications Committee agreed to send an email to students informing them that their application had been processed and returned to their College in order to allow the students to follow-up with their College if need be.

This year, the Advice Service shared with the committee some of the challenges a few of our service-users have faced when they have received a diagnosis for a health condition or disability *after* their exams. One element of this problem is the substantial periods of time that many students have to face before receiving an appointment (which would be required for a diagnostic assessment to be made) with local NHS Services for students with ADHD. As a result of this, the CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer is currently working with the support of the Secretary of the Applications Committee and the Secretary of the Board of Exams to produce a plan to address this issue.

D. ADVICE QUALITY STANDARD

As was referenced in last year's Annual Report, obtaining the Advice Quality Standard (AQS) has been an aspiration since the Service's first year of activity. The AQS is "primarily an organisational standard, designed to ensure that advice organisations are well run and provide good client care. The AQS gives assurance regarding quality of advice. Key requirements include training, supervisions and file review." Last year's Annual Report also noted that the increase in staff levels provided greater scope to begin the process of applying for AQS. This year the Advice Service team decided at their Lent Term Away-Day to pursue an application for AQS. Since then, the team members working on this area have been meeting regularly to discuss progress with the required evidence. Our Easter Term Away-Day provided an opportunity to work on the tasks required for obtaining AQS. This included considering a strategic plan for the Service, and undertaking an in-depth analysis of our student feedback, in order to consider where the Service could develop further. Neither of these were new activities for the Advice Service, and this shows the Service's ability to exemplify the institutional behaviours expected of AQS holders.

E. NEW AREAS OF ADVICE

Through the various issues that students have brought to the Advice Service over the years, as well as in discussions with other service-providers within the Collegiate University, we had become aware that certain gaps existed in the range of advice that is available to students at Cambridge. As such, we had started to record areas where students were struggling to get consistent and quality advice. By asking other service-providers to refer students to the Service regardless of whether we covered that area of advice, we were able to provide quality referrals to the appropriate advisory networks, and keep a record of these enquiries.

Over time, this has allowed us to explore whether we should be broadening the areas for which we provide advice. At our Away Day in January, we determined that it would be beneficial to students if the Advice Service more formally offered financial advice to students (including financial advice during intermission and student money advice), and we have been offering this type of advice since Lent 2016. As this is a new area of advice for us, we recognise that these types of cases are likely to be more time consuming in the first

couple of years while we develop our knowledge “on the job” and with training, but we think that this investment in time will be worthwhile in the long term.

In order to offer the same quality of advice on financial matters as we do in all of the Service’s other areas of advice, we have increased our knowledge of financial advice through our membership of NASMA (National Union of Student Money Advisers) where we have access to multiple resources, regional meetings, training opportunities, as well as a community of advisers where we can share information and ask questions. Furthermore, we have benefited from the knowledge of our colleagues at the Union Advice Service of the University of East Anglia for whom money advice is a key area. Finally, the Advice Service Manager attended a one day course entitled Strategies and Options for dealing with Debt. The Advice Service staff members will continue to increase their knowledge as suitable training opportunities become available.

One area that we had been considering for future development was mediation but we were delighted to take part in discussions where it was decided that the University Mediation Service would be extended to include students.

F. STAFFING STRUCTURE

In 2015/16, the staffing level of the Service went from 1.8 Student Advisors to 2 FTE (excluding sabbatical officers). The staff members consist of the Advice Service Manager and the Student Advisor. This allowed the Service to continue last year’s trend of further reducing the sabbatical officers’ caseloads thus allowing them to shift focus to the development and marketing of the Service.

The Student Advisor sees the majority of the students who come to the Service and also assists the Advice Service Manager in the day-to-day management of the Advice Service, thus allowing the Advice Service Manager to focus on the development of the Service, as well as on some of the more complex cases.

G. ROLE OF SABBATICAL ADVICE OFFICERS

Since the inception of the Service, there has been a view that sabbatical officers should be part of the Advice Service team and undertake casework. There are real benefits to the Service of this approach, as sabbatical officers bring an in-depth understanding and experience of student life, knowledge of the informal processes at work within the institution, and also the background to any changes that are made to relevant procedures and processes relevant to student cases. In addition, sabbatical officers benefit as casework provides them with a more concrete understanding of policies and procedures and how they work in practice. It also allows them to work with students on an individual basis. However, in previous years the casework load on sabbatical officers has been considered to be too high, and to limit their representative potential outside of the Service. The increase in staff resources has allowed for a reduction in the proportion of cases being undertaken by sabbatical officers from 50% of cases in 2012-13, 37% in 2013-14, 16% in 2014-15, and 13% in 2015-16.

In addition to supporting individual students, sabbatical advice officers play an important role in advertising and promoting the Service. This includes attendance at roadshows and ensuring that information about the Advice Service is presented at training events. Sabbatical officers also play an important role in making their

friends and those they work with aware of the Service. This year the sabbatical officer team as a whole has worked to develop the publicity and awareness of the Service, particularly by attending and emphasising the existence and utility of the Service in their interactions with other students. This has the benefits of making sure that students are aware that the Advice Service is provided to them by CUSU and the Graduate Union, and provides further opportunity for sabbatical officers to interact with students on an informal basis.

8. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

A. STUDENT AWARENESS

Last year's Annual Report cited student awareness of the Service as one of our main challenges. It was suggested that further work on awareness-raising among students, and closer liaison with College and University service providers, as well as academic Departments within the University would be beneficial in overcoming this challenge. This year has seen an increase in the number of roadshows, a new name and brand for the Service, and continued work with a range of service providers. The Service has also begun to work with the University's Schools.

In addition to this, over the course of the last academic year a Welfare Guide has been created, and work has also started on a Welfare App. These represent important opportunities to raise student awareness of the Service. Social media and College Welfare Officers make up two hugely important sources of awareness-raising among students, and work with them should continue in future years.

Student awareness of the Service will hopefully continue to develop further as the shared CUSU/GU building is accessed by more students. It is noteworthy that this year, 12% of the students who used the Service were referred to it by friends, and in our feedback survey 83% of students stated that they would recommend the Service to a friend. It is therefore important that all students who use the Service have a positive experience of doing so, and that the impression students have of the Service is a positive one. In the coming year, The Advice Service will consider how it collects and considers client feedback to ensure that the Service is informed by those who use it.

B. ADDITIONAL ADVICE OFFICERS

From July 2016, CUSU's first full-time Disabled Students' Officer will be in position, and the Graduate Union is looking to elect its second full-time sabbatical officer later in 2016. These two roles will clearly allow CUSU and the GU to develop their representational and campaigning activity, and discussions are currently underway regarding how these roles will interact with the Advice Service.

9. CONCLUSION

The Service has seen real benefits from its two parent unions working together in the same building. The advice and support we offer has been utilised by students more effectively as our new environment has become more visible, and we hope that this will continue as the building attains distinction as a central Students' Unions' hub. The number of students who accessed the Service this year has increased by 48%, and with our continuous efforts to raise awareness about the Service and build links with colleagues within the Collegiate University, we feel optimistic that our numbers will increase further next year.

Wider-reaching training within the Service has helped broaden our expertise thus allowing us to extend our advice work to student finance, which has further enhanced the Service's ability to provide a quality source of support to students.

The past year has been an exciting time of development and establishment, in part as a result of locational changes, but also due to the diligent work of the Advice Officers in raising the profile of the Service. We look forward to welcoming the new sabbatical officers in July and gaining from all that they will bring to the Service.

Poppy Ellis Logan

CUSU-GU Welfare and Rights Officer (2015-16)

Lisa Déry

CUSU-GU Advice Service Manager

Rachel Wilson

CUSU-GU Student Advisor

Rob Cashman

CUSU Education Officer (2015-16)

Charlie Chorley

CUSU Women's Officer (2015-16)

10. APPENDIX – CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1

A PhD student has made an appointment with the Students' Unions' Advice Service to talk about failing their first year report and not being registered for the PhD. The student states that they have been struggling with mental health issues which have impacted on their ability to work.

Role of the Advice Officer:

- Listen
- Explore the sources of support available - for example, suggest the student speaks with their supervisor or the appropriate person in their Department such as the Director of Graduate Education, as well as their Graduate Tutor
- Inform the student about the Disability Resource Centre and the Counseling Service and the support these services can provide to students with mental health issues
- Discuss the University's procedure on requesting a 'Review of the Results of Examinations for Postgraduate Qualifications' and make sure that the student understands the grounds under which a review can be sought
- Offer to help the student draft their representation about the conduct and/or outcome of the examination and discuss what relevant evidence and supporting documentation might be included
- Meet again and talk through with the student how to structure the representation in an effective way, as well as working out which evidence it would be appropriate to include.

CASE STUDY 2

An undergraduate student drops in to speak to an Advice Officer. The student has a long standing illness which has recently flared up and required them to stay in hospital for a couple of weeks, which impacted on their work. The College has suggested they intermit due to the amount of work they have missed but the student does not want to as they are now feeling better. The student would like to know what their options are in this situation.

Role of the Advice Officer:

- Listen
- Explore with the student why they feel that intermitting would not be the best option for them, and discuss the pros and cons of intermitting
- Think about with the student what would happen if they became unwell again and were unable to prepare for or sit their exams
- Talk through with the student why they would like to continue, and explore together what the student could do to help them catch up with their work
- Explore sources of support available such as the Disability resource Centre, and discuss the University's policy on exam access arrangements

- Offer to attend with the student any meetings they have with the department or their College to discuss their situation.