



**Union Advice Service: Annual
Report**

2013-2014

table of contents

introduction	3
staffing	4
advice service usage	5
student demographics	6
fee status	8
case types	9
academic	12
appeals	13
complaints	14
housing	16
looking forward	19
thank you	20

introduction

This report has been produced to provide an insight into what the Students' Union Advice Service does. We hope that the information provided will highlight the benefits of the service, as well as being used to guide future developments.

The Advice Service aims to sort and prevent students problems, with help, advice and support. The Service is independent, free and confidential and open to all UEA students.

Advice and support can be offered in a variety of ways; face to face, email and telephone appointments, Skype, Drop In sessions and through our online resources.

The Advice Service offers advice in the following areas; Academic, Housing Information, Rights at Work, Benefits, Debt and Personal Issues. If we cannot help, we make referrals to those who can. We help students to explore all the options and encourage students to seek informal remedies where possible.

UEA refer to the Advice Service in formal letters and students do benefit from this.

This report relates to the period 1st October 2013 to the 30th September 2014.

Any errors are our own.

staffing

Louise Withers Green was the Academic Officer for the 2013/14 academic year. When Louise handed over her post in July 2014, her role was split into two: Undergraduate Education Officer and Postgraduate Education Officer.

The Undergraduate Education Officer for 2014/15 is Connor Rand, and the Postgraduate Education Officer for 2014/15 is Liam McCafferty.

Bintu Foday was the Community and Student Rights Officer for the 2013/14 academic year.

Holly Staynor became Welfare, Community and Diversity Officer in July 2014.

The Advice Service staffing up to May 2014:

2 x Full Time Advice Workers – Lucy Scott and Rachel McGrath

2 x Part Time Temp Advice Workers (equivalent to one full time position)– Nigel Walsh and Jo Plumstead

1 x Full Time Admin/Reception Worker – Lydia Headden

As a result of the Union restructure, the service became part of the Advocacy department:

Full Time Head of Advice – Lucy Scott

Full Time Advice and Information Worker – Jo Plumstead

Full Time Advice and Volunteer Worker – Mike Hill (started August 2014)

Advice Worker – Rachel McGrath (part time from May 2014)

Full Time Liberation, Diversity and Equality Coordinator – Louise Goux Wirth (started July 2014)

In May 2014, we started using students to staff reception. This has proven extremely successful and has allowed us to utilise the skills, enthusiasm and ideas that the membership have.

In July 2014 the admin reception moved into the Info Point in Union House.

The Advice Centre is open from 9am to 5pm Monday-Friday, with appointments available between 10am and 4pm, though students can book appointments outside of these times if required; the service operates throughout the academic year.

advice service usage

A slowly increasing number of students are using the Advice Service; approximately a 16% increase from 2012/13. Details of this are broken down in Table 1, below.

	2012-13	2013-14
Number of unique clients	761	883
Number of cases	1,029	1,198
Number of appointments	1,122	1,379
Average number of appointments per case	1.09	1.15

Table 1 - Breakdown of unique clients, cases and appointments in the last two years.

The Advice Service saw 5.62% of all students at UEA.

student demographics

Most of the students who come to the Advice Service are studying an undergraduate degree. As Figure 1 shows (below), a clear majority of the students who had appointments with the Advice Service last year were studying at an undergraduate level, consistent with the undergraduate numbers at UEA.

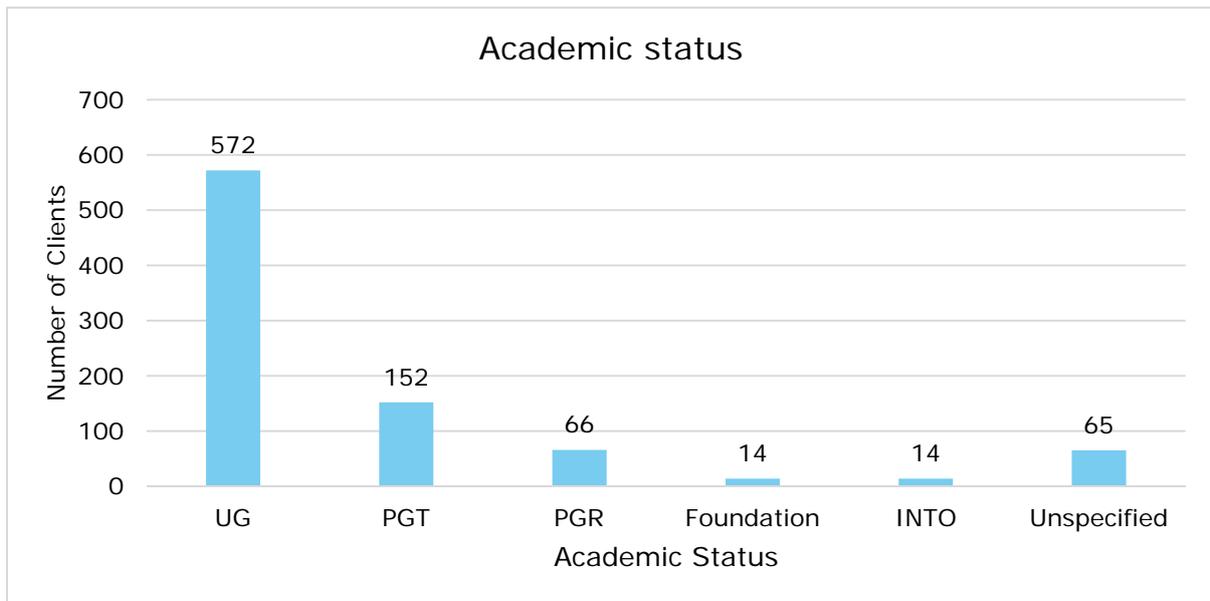


Figure 1

Advice Service usage in terms of study type. Figure 2 (below) shows the academic breakdown of individuals seen in the Advice Service:

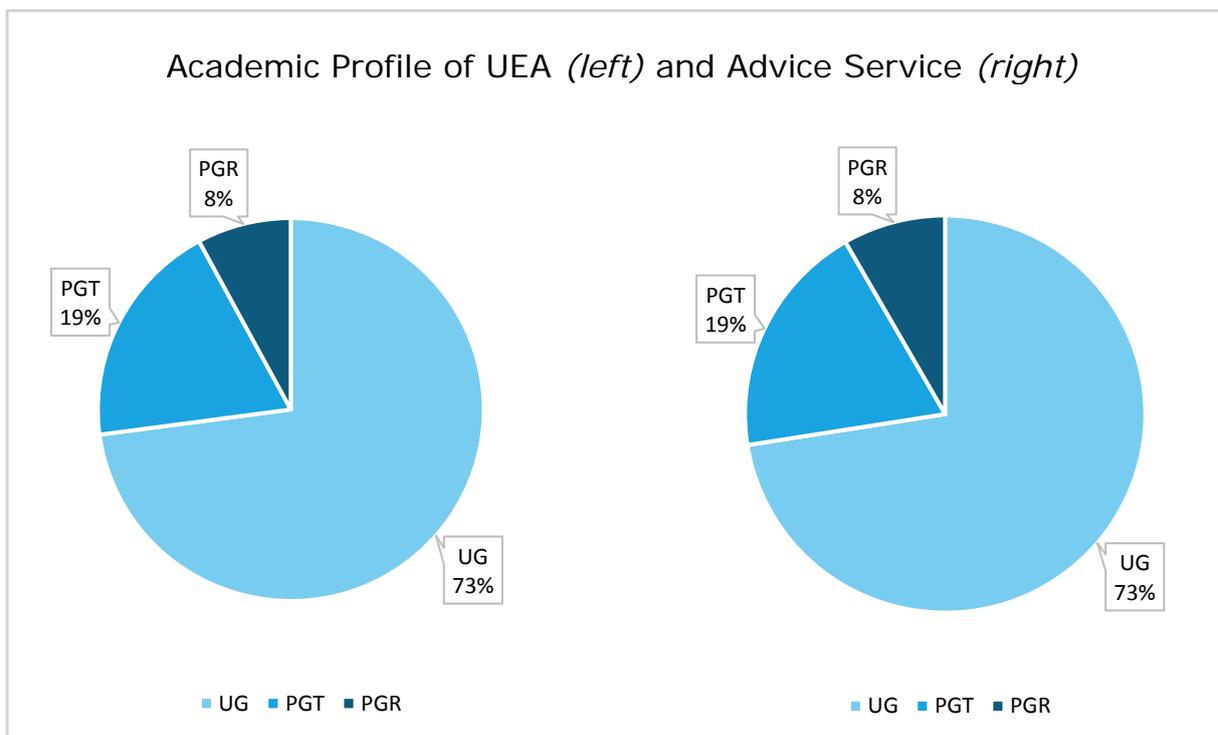


Figure 2

Most of the students who come to the Advice Service are female. (Figure 3, below). This is consistent with the female majority at UEA.

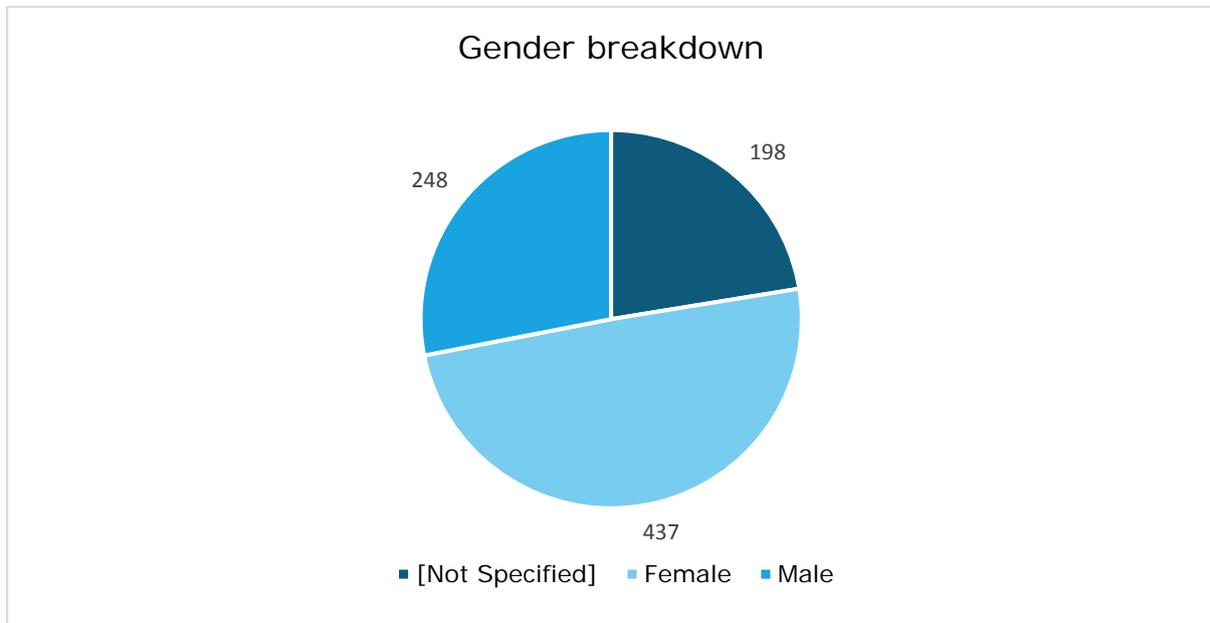


Figure 3

Our gender profile is identical to UEA. (See Figure 4, below.)

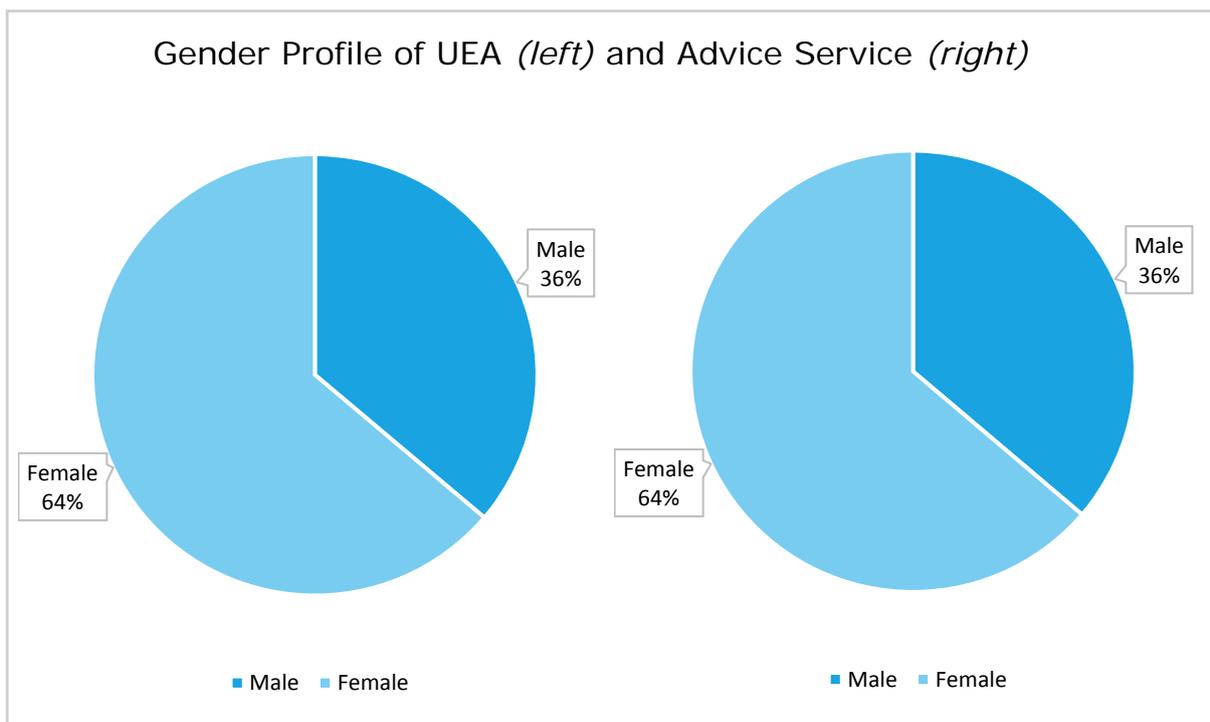


Figure 4

fee status

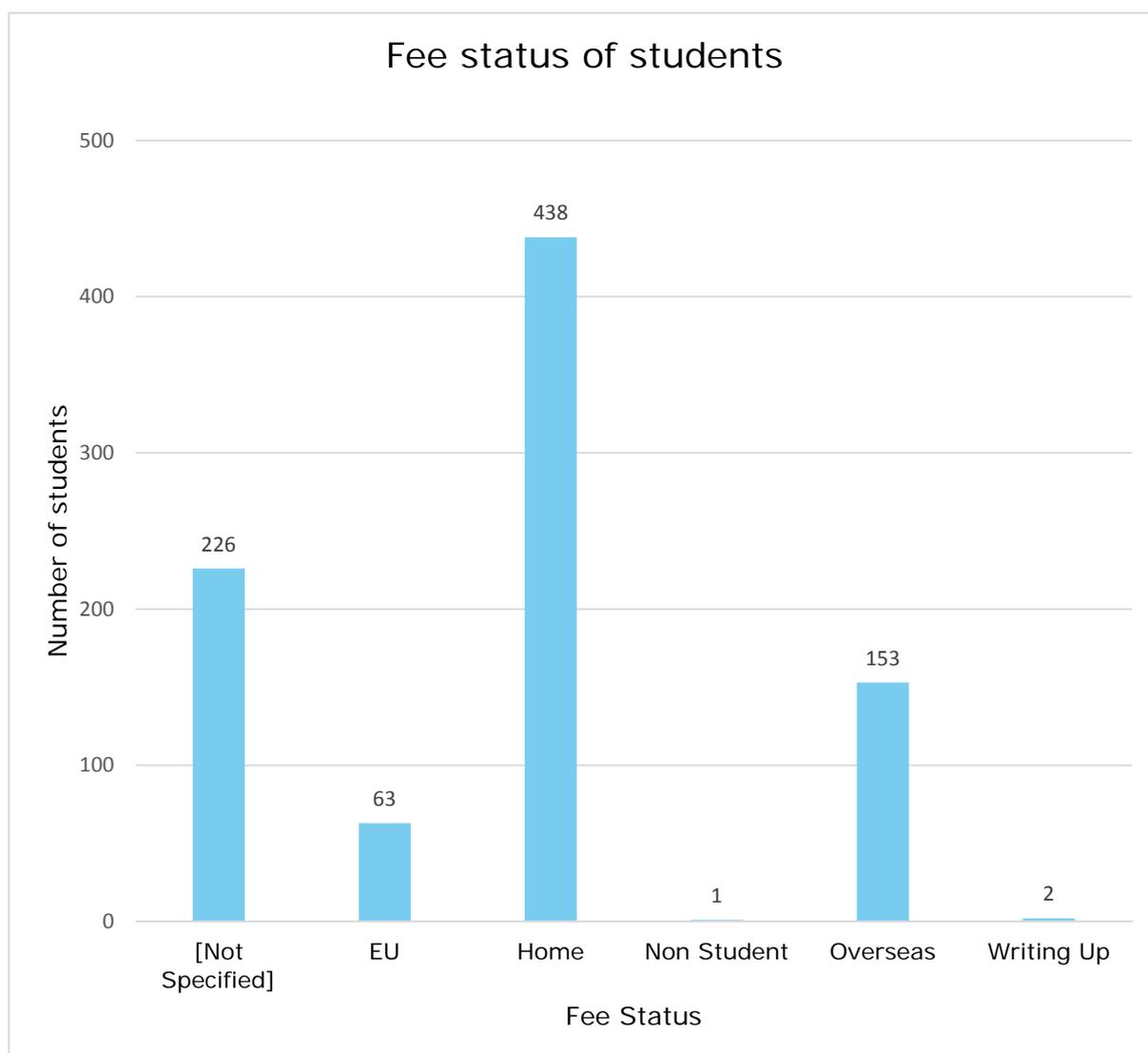


Figure 3

50% of students who visited the Advice Service had a home fee status; approximately 17% of students had an overseas fee status and a further 7% of students had an EU fee status.

It is worth noting that '[Not Specified]' has a total of 226 students in it, meaning that 26% of our clients have unknown fee status. This perhaps implies that AdvicePro (the Advice Service's data management software) has not been used correctly. Small discrepancies are to be expected but ideally the Advice Service should look into reducing this where possible by standardising the use of AdvicePro.

case types

AdvicePro is a secure case management application developed in association with Advice UK. It is the program used by the Advice Service to track the progression of a case and also book appointments. When cases are uploaded onto AdvicePro, they are broadly categorised into matter types: Academic, Housing, Employment, Student Finance, Student Issues and Miscellaneous.

The majority of cases relate to academic matters. 61% of the cases were about academic matters; 28% were about housing and 6% about student finance.

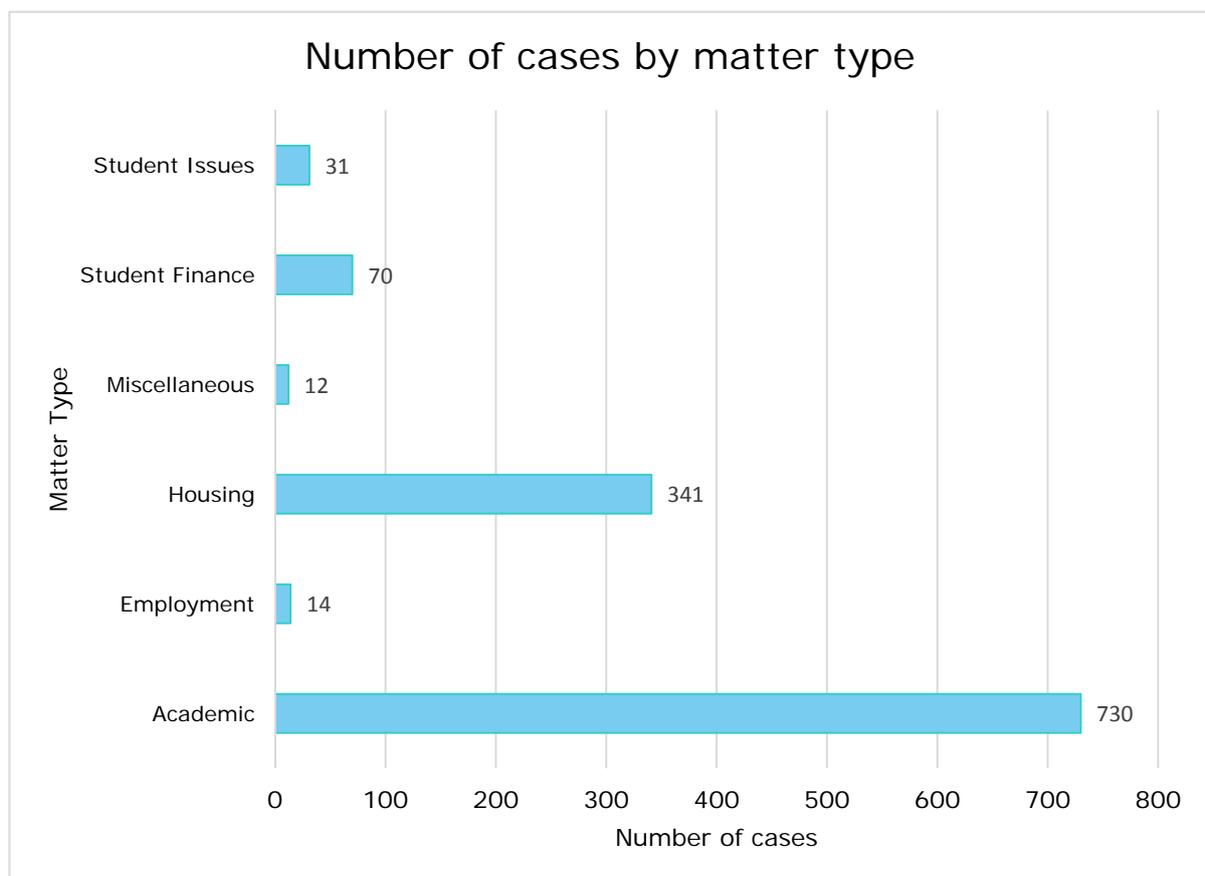


Figure 6

Matters peak at particular times of year. The peaks follow events and Student Union campaigns in the academic calendar, as shown in Figure 7 (overleaf). There are peaks in academic cases around deadline times and results publication in the summer. The January peak of housing cases correlates with the release of the Home Run housing list in the same month. Students actively seek housing in January and February and there is a sharp decline until after exams, when students begin looking again. New students also traditionally begin to look for housing in August, such as postgraduate students or undergraduates who have been unable to obtain

accommodation on campus (i.e. if the student has missed the accomodation deadline or they gain their place at UEA through clearing, in which case on-campus accommodation is not always guaranteed).

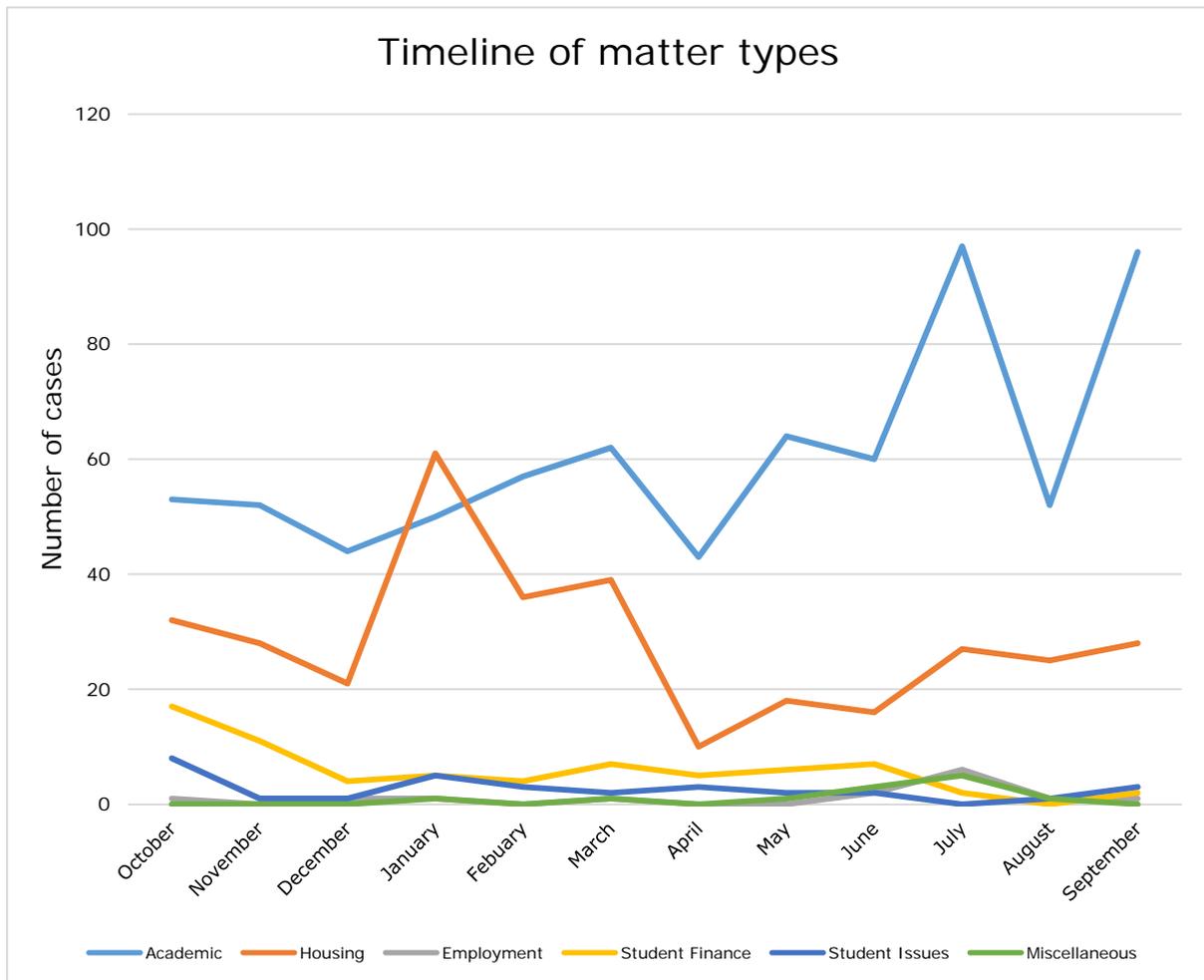


Figure 7

Being able to pre-empt a rise in a type of case has innumerable benefits and guides the type of information and key messages that are released by the service at particular times. See 'Looking Forward to 2014/15' on page 18 for further details.

The broad matter groups are all broken into submatters to enable us to identify clear patterns that motivate individuals to seek advice. Figure 8 (overleaf) breaks down the most common submatters for all open cases.

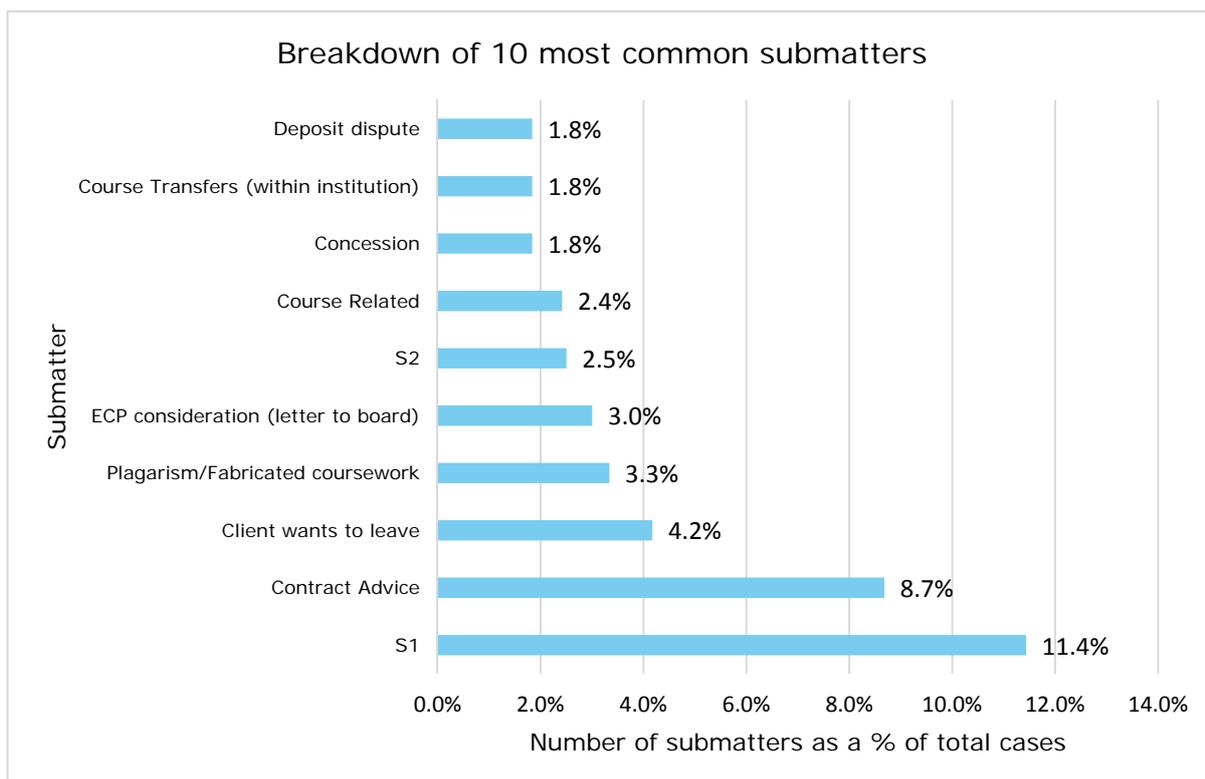


Figure 8

'S1' refers to Stage 1 academic appeal submissions and it's clear that the S1 submatter dominates our cases, with the second biggest submatter being contract advice.

Additional information can be further drawn from considering the three most popular submitters for each case matter. Excluding academic appeals, the top 3 submitters of each matter can be seen in Figure 9 (overleaf). Such findings inform us on key areas which the Advice Service can focus on next year.

Running information sessions and having online resources available for contract advice and improving resources for stage 1 appeal submissions will be a priority for the Advice Service in the year ahead and are included in the Advice and Information strategic plan.

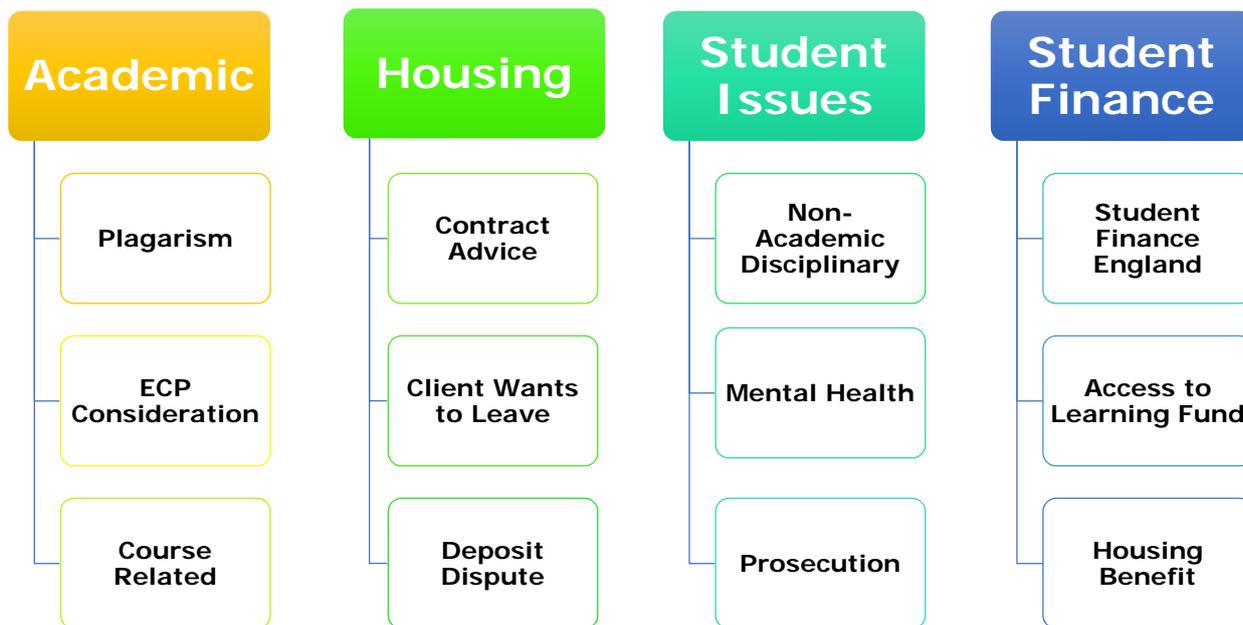


Figure 9

academic

The three schools with the highest number of academic cases are the school of Nursing Sciences (NSC), Norwich Medical School (MED) and the School of Computing Sciences (CMP). See Figure 10 (below).

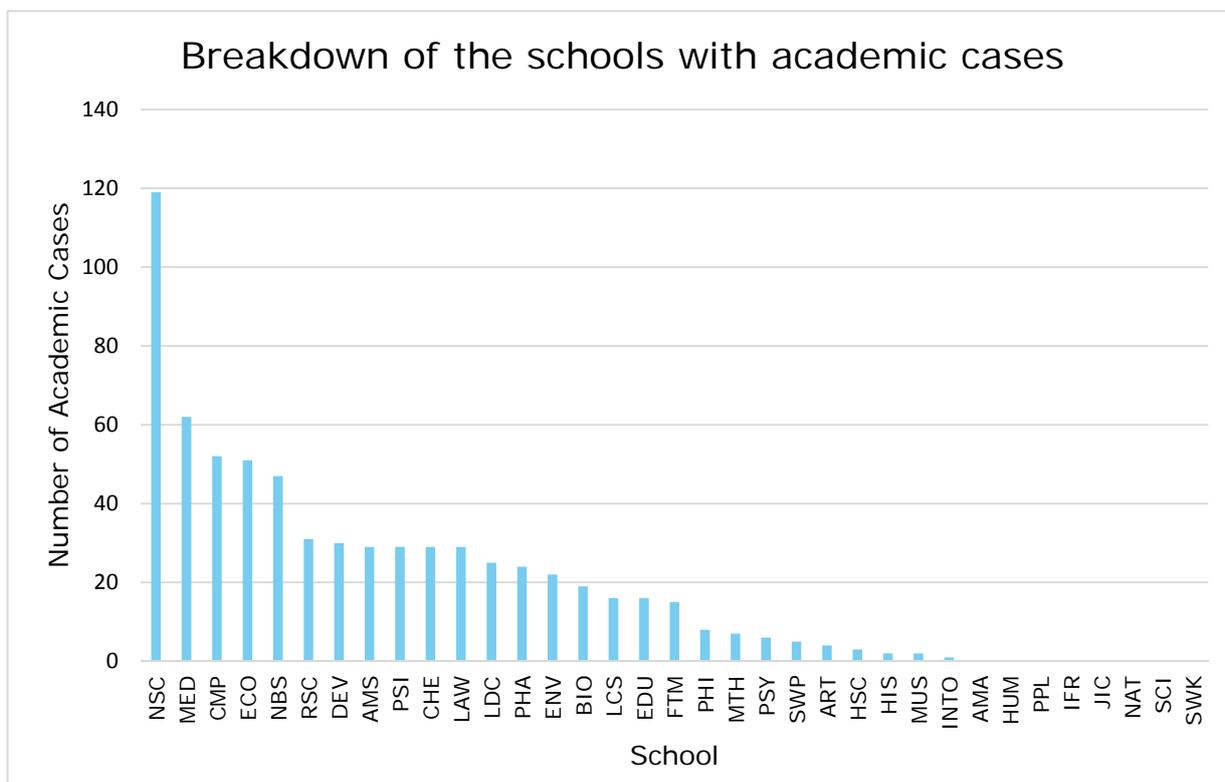


Figure 10

The School of Nursing Sciences reports 16%, Norwich Medical School 8%. The School of Computing Sciences reports 7%. The percentage number of cases in relation to the number of total students within NSC, CMP and MED is 12.2%, 8.9% and 5.8% respectively.

appeals

In total, the Advice Service supported 43% of the Stage 1 appeals that undergraduate's submitted to the university. Of these, 65% of appeals supported by the Advice Service had a positive outcome. A positive outcome includes any appeals that were upheld, upheld changed or informally resolved whereas negative outcomes consist of rejected, upheld not changed and out of time appeals.

Upheld Changed – This refers to appeals or complaints that have been upheld by the FACP and then referred to another body, such as an Exam Board, for final discussions which have then resulted in a positive change for the student.

Upheld not changed - This refers to appeals or complaints that have been upheld by the FACP and then referred to another body, such as an Exam Board, for final discussions which have not resulted in a positive change for a student.

Below demonstrates positive outcomes against total outcomes for all stage 1 appeals.

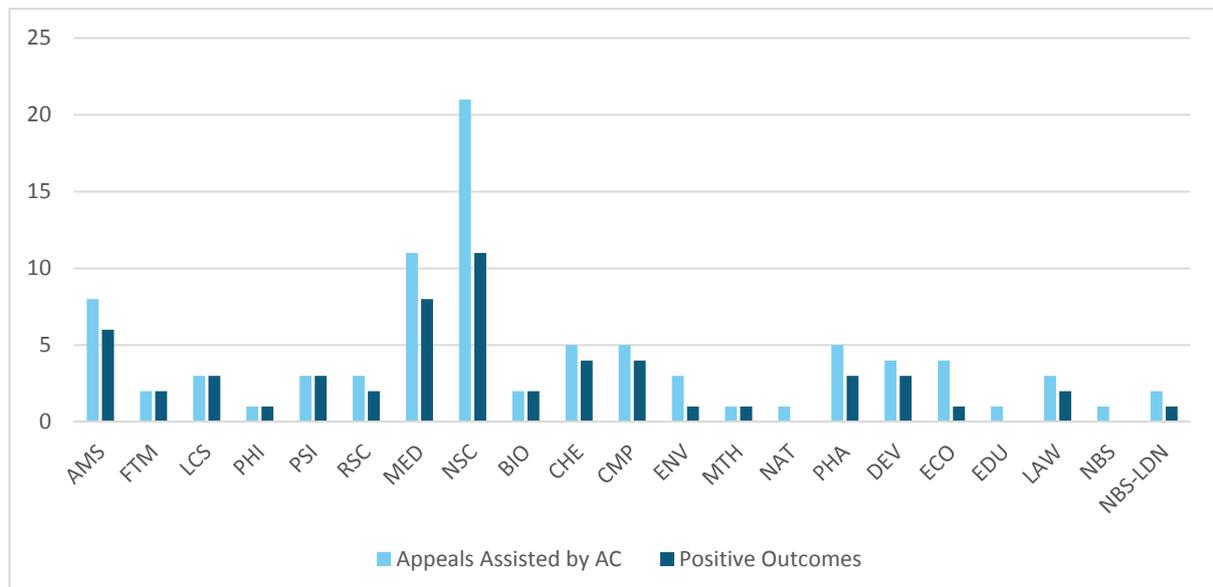


Figure 11

The Advice Service supported 69% of Stage 2 appeals that undergraduate's submitted to the university. Of these, 33% had positive outcomes.

The Advice Service supported 67% of Stage 1 appeals that postgraduate's submitted to the university. Of these, 53% had positive outcomes. The Advice Service assisted with 100% of the Stage 2 postgraduate appeals, with 50% concluding with a positive outcome.

“Without your support and help I didn't know where to start with my appeal.”

complaints

In total, UEA received 16 stage one undergraduate academic complaints. The Advice Service assisted with 31% of these, providing students with help organising their evidence, drafting their statements and completing the form. This is broken down into different schools in Figure 12 (below). Of these, 40% concluded with a positive outcome. Both UEA and the Advice Service received no stage two academic complaints from undergraduate's.

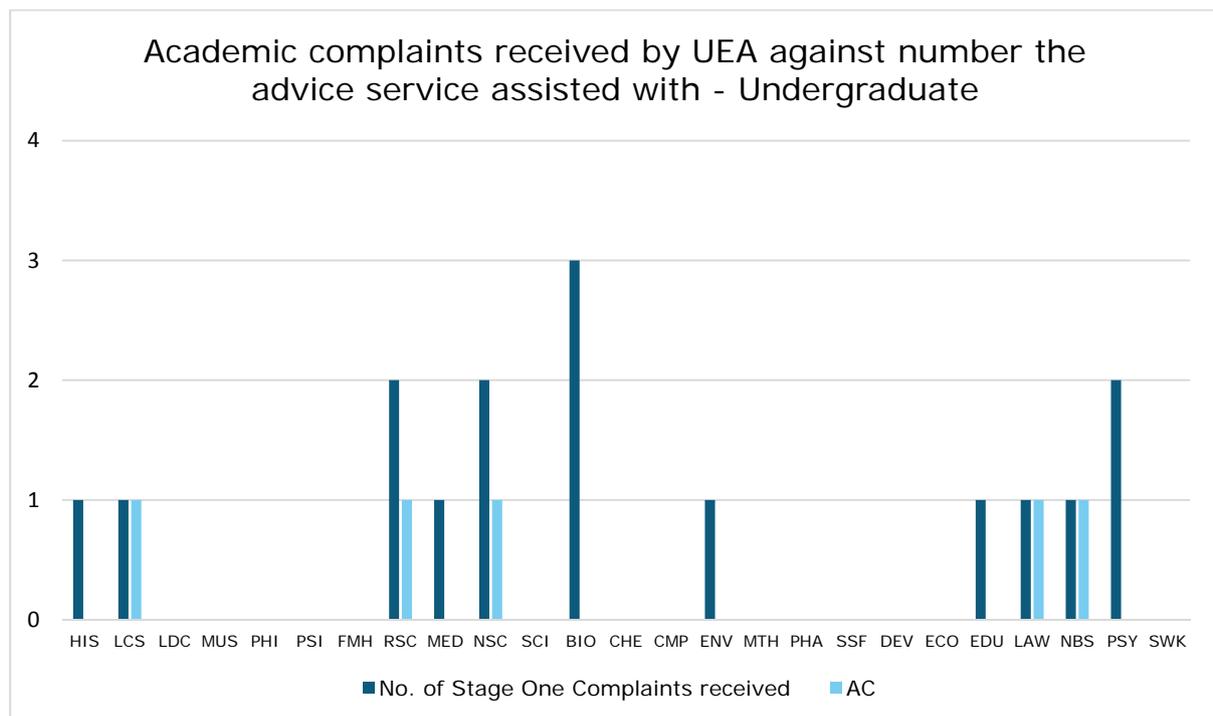


Figure 12

In total, UEA received 8 Stage One academic complaints from postgraduate students. The Advice Service assisted with 25% of these; 50% had a positive outcome. This is broken down into different schools in Figure 13. The Advice Service did not assist with any of the 4 Stage Two academic complaints submitted in the last academic year.

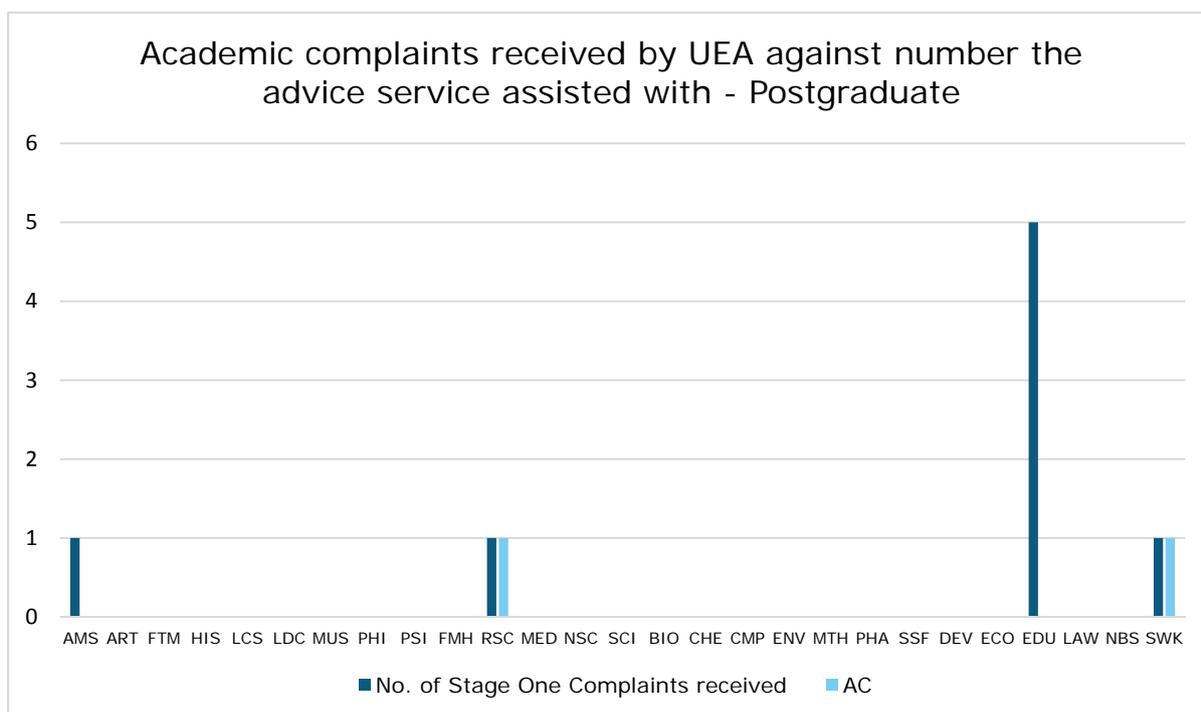


Figure 13

Table 2 summarises the data for Stage 1 and Stage 2 appeals and complaints for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

		S1			S2		
		Total received by UEA	Total received by Advice	Advice Success Rate (%)	Total received by UEA	Total received by Advice	Advice Success Rate (%)
Appeal	U G	206	89 (43%)	65	35	24 (68%)	33
	P G	39	26 (66%)	53	6	6 (100%)	50
Complaint	U G	16	5 (33%)	40	0	0 (N/A)	N/A
	P G	8	2 (25%)	50	4	0 (0%)	N/A

Table 2 – Summary of S1 and S2 for Appeals and Complaints by UG and PG

housing

Housing is our second most popular area of advice. Typically, UEA students move into private sector accommodation in their second year of study. To assist the transition, the Union operates Home Run Lettings; it releases a compact housing list of local properties in January.

In March 2014, NUS published its research into the state of student housing in the UK: Homes Fit for Study.

To many it was no surprise that a large proportion of students in the UK are living in poor standard accommodation and having a negative experience as tenants.

NUS headline findings:

- Students renting from a letting agent paid on average £400 more to set up their tenancy and they were more likely to have negative experiences such as pressure to sign a contract.
- Only 51% of students were satisfied overall by the management carried out by agents.
- 61% of students had damp, mould or condensation in their home.

The study pointed out how those who found their house through their University or Students Union faced significantly fewer problems and it called for Universities and Students Union to make more advice and support available.

We're really pleased to say that, whilst some students may have a negative experience living in the private sector, our statistics show that our students fare better than most students around the country, with only 20 cases concerning disrepair reported last year.

Figure 14 reflects some of the most popular reasons for housing cases, separating Home Run Lettings and the private sector.

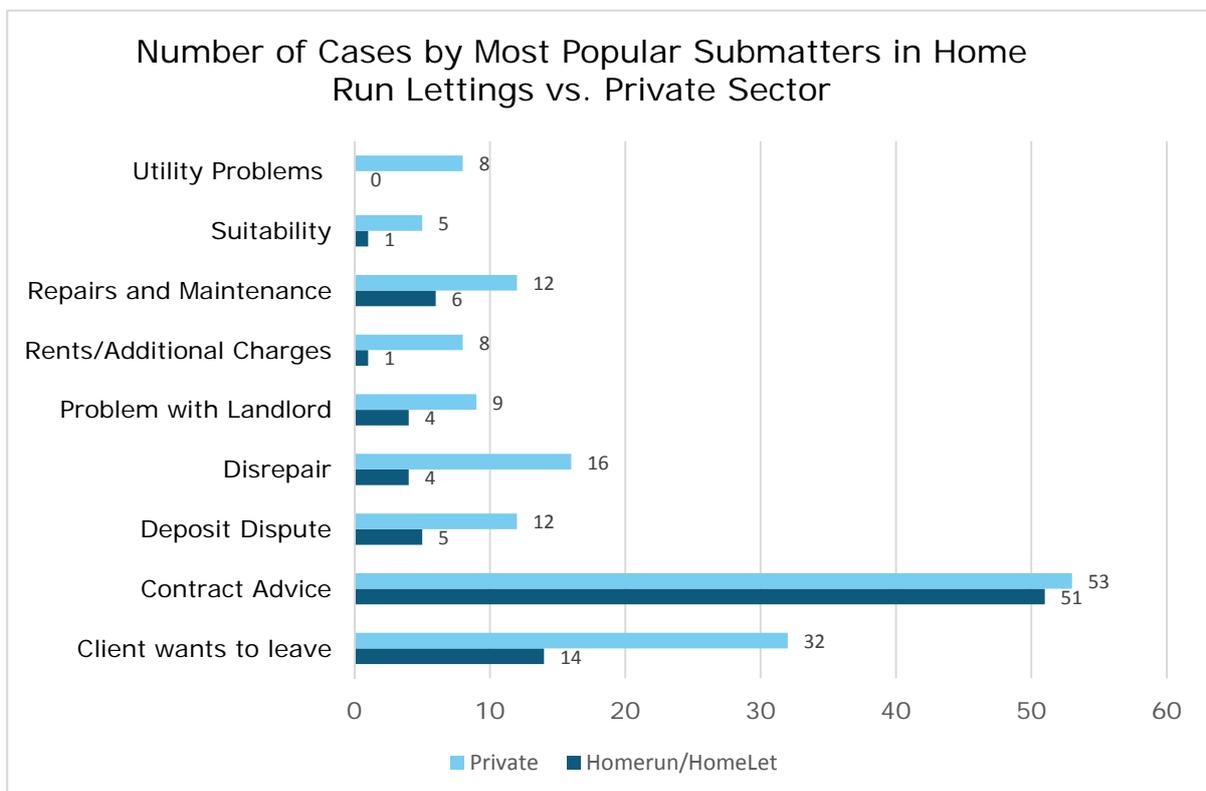


Figure 14

The Union's Home Run accreditation scheme is the largest provider of student housing in the area. Home Run is free to students and using them saved students £93,000 in agency fees each year. It aims to influence the market and drive up standards across the private rented sector and be at the heart of the private sector in Norwich.

The Advice Service organises several housing events, in conjunction with the law society Street Law, to ease the transition into private sector accommodation. Events include; housing information stalls, Q&A sessions, Housing Socials, the production and distribution of a House Hunting Guide and awareness campaigns around safety and key issues such as deposit protection.

Following a campaign to increase the numbers taking up preventative measures to ensure a successful tenancy and using housing event feedback there was an overall increase of 16% in the number of students who came to housing events; Info Stall, Q&A or housing social, when compared with 2012/13 figures.

The most popular activity that students sought housing advice for was contract advice. Most undergraduate students at UEA have not let a property before, and are concerned about being "ripped off", or signing a contract which has "hidden" clauses. Students are encouraged to book an appointment with an Advice Worker before signing a tenancy agreement, so they can have any clauses explained regardless of who they rent with.

There has been an increase of 19% in contract advice appointments from 2012/13. The benefits of this can be seen in the decrease in the number of students who experience problems in their off-campus accommodation, such as housemate problems and difficulties understanding their tenancy agreements.

"I can't really imagine dealing with this housing problem without your help."

looking forward to 2014/15

Our vision is that all of our members are aware of the Advice Service and not just at the point they need us. We hope they become empowered to use this advice and understand their rights in the future.

As a service we have identified that there is a clear need for more flexible provision in terms of appointments. We will develop and run a feedback survey about the quality of the service offered and the data from this will be used to develop the service and will be used in consultation about the development of the new Gateway space in Union House.

The change of location from overlooking the square means that we need to think about the profile of the service and how and when students become aware of the service.

We are in the process of developing our resources and those that are web-based and have trialled Drop-In sessions in Union House and at various locations around campus such as the hubs. These are things that we will continue to develop, monitor and evaluate in the year ahead.

We are working closely with the Welfare, Community and Diversity Officer, the Education Officers and Education and Engagement team to develop our services further to inform and enhance projects, campaigns and policies.

The Service has ensured that the positive relationship with the volunteer society Street Law has continued, and they will continue to provide support throughout housing week and with the planned housing events in 2015. The use of volunteers within the Advice Service has been planned and a volunteer strategy, role specification and training programme have been drafted with the aim to roll out volunteer opportunities within the Advice Service from 2015.

thank you

A big thank you to those that have supported the Advice Service; the Advice Team for their hard work and dedication to ensuring that students receive helpful and timely information, the Student Officer team for their support and awareness campaigns that highlight key issues, Street Law for their ongoing support of our housing events and the team of student staff who have helped in the transition of the Advice Service this year. We would also like to thank our colleagues at UEA for their ongoing support and referrals to the Service.

Thanks to Joseph Honeywood (studying BSc Psychology) and Sarah A. Jones (studying BA English Literature with Creative Writing) for compiling and editing this report.

Holly Staynor

Welfare, Community and Diversity Officer 2014/15

Lucy Scott

Head of Advice

“The advisor I worked with was very forthcoming with information, not judgmental at all, and gave me suggestions I strongly doubt I would have got from any UEA advisors/teachers/staff members.”

“This is the first time I’ve used this service and I’ve been very impressed with the help and advice provided. I would definitely recommend the service to others.”