

## Revisiting the Staff to Student Ratio Outcomes of the HOCS Survey 2018

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### Abstract

*The reporting on the data for Q.25 of the ANZSSA Heads of Counselling Services HOCS Benchmarking Survey 2018 Summary Report as published in JANZSSA April Issue 1 2019 needs and deserves clarification. This article provide that clarification, some critical wording correction and some additional comparative data to highlight with more specificity on how institutions responding to the 2018 HOCS Survey either met or did not, meet, criteria to satisfy the international and national best practice standards for FTE staffing to enrolled student ratios for counselling services in post-secondary education. The institutional data identifies staffing levels and the number of students enrolled and does not identify responding institutions by name. Based on the HOCS survey returns it is concluded that none of the institutions met the international best practice standards for staffing FTE to enrolled student ratio of 1 to 1,000-1,500 and very few institutions achieved the ANZSSA best practice standard of 1 to 3,000.*

### Introduction

Q.25 of the ANZSSA Heads of Counselling Services HOCS Benchmarking Survey 2018 Summary Report published in JANZSSA April Issue 1 2019 unpacked data submitted by heads of counselling services (HOCS) including responses to Q.25 which asked about the staffing to student ratio offered by the responding institutions at the time of completing the survey between March and June 2018. A table attempted to demonstrate which institution met the FTE staff to student ratio gold standard, the ANZSSA standard, and what staffing to student ratio was indeed most common (Andrews, 2019). What was initially published in relation to Q.25 did not achieve this goal and generated some confusion as to the minimum staffing to student standard highlighted by the ANZSSA best practice guidelines. The following is provided to clarify and hopefully achieve the original comparative goal more successfully.

### Best practice standards

The 3rd iteration of the Guidelines for the Provision of Counselling Services in the Post-Secondary Education Sectors in Australia and New Zealand, last updated in 2010, was published in JANZSSA in 2011 (Volume 37 Issue 1). At that time the staff to student ratio was again endorsed at 1 to 3,000 as a minimum having been set that ratio at the 2<sup>nd</sup> review (circa 2004).

The ANZSSA best practice guidelines also highlight the international best practice guidelines (IACS) for staff to student ratios as one FTE to 1,000-1,500 enrolled students.

These guidelines were again proposed for review in 2018 and a meeting of the Heads of Counselling Services held at the ANZSSA Conference in December 2018 discussed the guidelines and the ANZSSA recommended staffing to student ratio of one counsellor FTE per 3,000 enrolled students, again noting that this should be considered as minimum best practice. The 2018 meeting of HOCS in Australia and New Zealand identified the IACS ratio (1 to 1,000-1,500) as the gold standard for counselling service best practice.

What does Q.25 of the HOCS 2018 Survey highlight?

Q.25 asks responders to identify the established full time effective (FTE) professional staffing load for counselling service provision across all campuses. As published in Andrews (2019), thirty-five (35) different responses were logged for this question. Andrews (2019) in Table 6 identified the actual counselling staff FTE reported by each institution alongside enrolment numbers and this table is reproduced here for convenience as Table 1.

It is clear from the data that counsellor FTE allocation varies considerably across the higher

education sector in Australia and New Zealand. Unremarkably it is noted that the higher the student enrolment the higher the FTE staffing allocation. However, the FTE allocated for enrolment load shows considerable variation when compared to the student enrolments reported. For example, an FTE of five counsellors was reported to cater for very different enrolled student loads: being 17,853 at one institution, 21,371 at a second and 37,788 at a third. Another example demonstrates a counsellor FTE allocation of 7.4 for 23,109 at one institution and 30,767 at another. Such variation ensures a remarkable difference in the staffing to student enrolment ratio within the sector.

Table 1

FTE - excluding manager role	Frequency of Response	Institution # 1 Number enrolled March 2017	Institution # 2 Number enrolled March 2017	Institution # 3 Number enrolled March 2017
nil	1	300-400		
0.9	1	3,000		
1	1	9,507		
1.4	1	N/A		
2	1	6,000		
2.9	1	23,847		
3	2	18,887	26,547	
3.4	1	25,841		
5	3	17,853	21,371	37,788
5.1	1	20,898		
5.2	1	N/A-		
6.8	1	N/A		
7	1	42,208		
7.4	2	23,109	30,767	
7.9	2	26,975	24,891	
8	1	28,000		
8.8	1	52,331		
10	3	23,000	N/A	N/A
10.82	1	51,338		
11.2	1	36,746		
11.6	1	N/A		
11.8	1	70,000		
12	1	67,000		
12.4	1	58,210		
12.6	1	66,928		
13	1	38,000		
13.4	1	40,209		
18	1	73,807		

Table 2 below shows the enrolment data and demonstrates the variation in counsellor FTE to enrolled student ratio while highlighting the outcome against the IACS/AUCCCD and ANZSSA best practice benchmarks. The table also demonstrates the staffing FTE allocations that fall below both best practice recommendations within two categories: 1 counsellor FTE to >3,000 - <6,000 and 1 counsellor FTE to  $\geq 6,000$ .

Table 2

<b>Institution Enrolment load: lowest to highest</b>	<b>Counsellor FTE (in addition to the manager Role) by corresponding institution</b>	<b>Staffing FTE satisfies recommended International 2019 IACS and AUCCCD benchmark for FTE at 1 counsellor to &lt;1,000 – 1,500 enrolled students X = no ✓ = yes</b>	<b>Satisfies the recommended 2010 ANZSSA benchmark minimum FTE of 1 counsellor to ≤ 3,000 enrolled students (if multiple other student support services provided) X = no ✓ = yes</b>	<b>Less than best practice 1 FTE counsellor to &gt;3,000 - &lt;6,000 enrolled students X = no ✓ = yes</b>	<b>Less than best practice 1 FTE counsellor to ≥ 6,000 enrolled students X = no ✓ = yes</b>
300-400	0	x	x	x	
3,000	0.9	x	x	✓	
6,000	2	x	✓		
9,507	1	x	x	x	✓
17,853	5	x	x	✓	
18,887	3	x	x	x	✓
20,898	5.1	x	x	✓	
21,371	5	x	x	✓	
23,000	10	x	✓		
23,109	7.4	x	x	✓	
23,847	2.9	x	x	x	✓
24,891	7.9	x	x	✓	
25,841	3.4	x	x	x	✓
26,547	3	x	x	x	✓
26,975	7.9	x	x	✓	
28,000	8	x	x	✓	
30,767	7.4	x	x	✓	
36,746	11.2	x	x	✓	
37,788	5	x	x	x	✓
38,000	13	x	✓		
40,209	13.4	x	✓		
42,208	7	x	x	✓	
51,338	10.82	x	x	✓	
52,331	8.8	x	x	✓	
58,210	12.4	x	x	✓	
66,928	12.6	x	x	✓	
67,000	12	x	x	✓	
70,000	11.8	x	x	✓	
73,807	18	x	x	✓	

FTE identified for institutions where enrolment data was not available

N/A	1.4	Not able to be determined	Not able to be determined
N/A	5.2		
N/A	6.8		
N/A	10		
N/A	10		
N/A	11.6		

Drawing on the data reported in the table above it is important to note that:

- a) No participating institution met the counsellor to student ratio at the international gold standard of 1 FTE to 1,000-1,500 students.
- b) Four participating institutions met the counsellor to student ratio at the level of the ANZSSA minimum recommendation for best practice of 1 FTE to 3,000 students.
- c) Twenty-four participating institutions failed to meet the counsellor to student ratio at either the ANZSSA minimum or the international standard.
- d) Six institutions did not supply enrolment data and therefore could not be compared to either standard.

This considerable variation is also demonstrated when the looking at the data via the number of managers reporting allocation of similar counsellor FTE.

i. FTE of 0 to 1

Three (3) managers reported an FTE of 0 to 1. Enrolments reported for 2 (two) were < 3,000 and the other was <10,000.

ii. FTE between 1 and 2

Two (2) managers reported counsellor FTE between 1 and 2. Enrolment load reported was N/A and >9,500.

iii. FTE between 2 and 3

Three (3) managers reported counsellor FTE between 2 and 3. Enrolment loads were 18,887, 23,847 and 26,547.

iv. FTE between 3 and 3.5

One (1) manager reported a counsellor FTE between 3 and 3.5. The enrolment load reported was 25,841.

v. FTE between 5 and 5.2

Five (5) managers reported a counsellor FTE between 5 and 5.2. Enrolment loads were reported as N/A, 17,853, 20,898, 21,371 and 37,788.

vi. FTE of 6.8

One (1) manager reported a counsellor FTE of 6.8. Enrolment load data was N/A.

vii. FTE between 7 and 7.9

Five (5) managers reported a counsellor FTE between 7 and 7.9. Enrolment loads were reported as 23,109, 24,891, 26,975, 30,767 and 42,208.

viii. FTE as 8 to 8.8

Two (2) managers reported counsellor FTE as 8 to 8.8. Enrolment loads reported were 28,000 and

52,331.

ix. FTE as 10 to 10.82

Two (2) managers reported counsellor FTE as 10 to 10.82. Enrolment loads reported were 23,000 and 51,338.

x. FTE as 11.2 to 11.8

Three (3) managers reported counsellor FTE as 11.2 to 11.8. Enrolment loads reported were N/A, 36,746 and 70,000.

xi. FTE as 12 to 12.6

Three (3) managers reported counsellor FTE as 12 to 12.6. Enrolment loads reported were 58,210, 66,928 and 67,000.

xii. FTE as 13 to 13.4

Two (2) managers reported counsellor FTE as 13 to 13.4. Enrolment loads reported were 38,000 and 40,209.

xiii. FTE as 18

One (1) manager reported the counsellor FTE as 18. The enrolment load was reported as 73,807.

Considerable enrolment variations by institution was also demonstrated across the sector at the census date in March 2017. The range for students enrolled at March 2017 is 400 to 73,807.

Six (6) managers reported enrolment data as N/A.

Four (4) managers reported enrolments of <10,000.

Eight (8) managers reported enrolments between 15,000 and 25,000 students.

Five (5) managers reported enrolments between >25,000 to 35,000.

Five (5) managers reported enrolments between >35,000 to 45,000.

Two (2) managers reported enrolments between >45,000 to 55,000.

Five (5) managers reported enrolments of > 55,000.

For further reporting on the counsellor to student ratio see in Q26-29 in Andrews (2019).

## Conclusion

Overall the HOCS survey data (Andrews 2019) demonstrates considerable variation in institutional profiles, student enrolled numbers, cohort differences and the provision of student support services alongside counselling services. There is also considerable variation in services provided by counsellors beyond the one to one and face to face interventions. Because of these variations in sector and institutional context, care needs to be taken in drawing comparison between institutions in relation to the counselling service allocated resources and counsellor FTE.

The data identified above demonstrates that there is little evidence that Australian and New Zealand institutions within the higher education and post-secondary sector have, by and large, been willing to address even the minimum best practice standards recommended for counselling staff to student ratios and have relied on counselling services to manage increasing demand from increasing student enrolments that hold a diversity in cohort profiles with staffing ratios that are woefully below international best practice and which also fail, in almost all cases, to meet the minimum best practice standards set by ANZSSA more than fifteen years ago. Given these facts it is important to note how much growth and change has occurred within the sector within that timeframe.

Even with careful consideration of this variation it is hard not to draw the conclusion that those

services demonstrating a counsellor FTE resourcing of one FTE counsellor to < 3,000 enrolled students, i.e. better than the ANZSSA minimum best practice standards, are also demonstrating that the institution has responded to the published evidence, anecdotal reporting, service data and the student and sector wide requests for increased capacity to respond to student and institutional needs in relation to mental health and wellbeing. It goes without saying that the corollary is also evident.

## References

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