



Central Queensland
UNIVERSITY
Where Students Come First.

Re: Submission No 36 4/7/92

Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Parliament House
Cnr George & Alice Streets
Brisbane
QLD 4000

14 September 1998

Dear Sir or Madam

This document serves as a formal response from Central Queensland University to the Strategic Review of the Ombudsman. The document has been drafted from the office of the Freedom of Information Coordinator, which is the area of the University which has the most contact with the office of the Ombudsman.

Executive Summary

The Freedom of Information Coordinator agrees strongly with points 9, 11 and 12. There is a level of confusion, even in the University sector, about the powers and authority of the Ombudsman's office. Some form of education about the Ombudsman would be beneficial at each level of government.

It is important that the Ombudsman's Office take steps to assist with developing a preventative approach in order to avoid prolonged or malicious cases being raised and pursued. Central Queensland University would be supportive of any system which seeks to address cases prior to them being brought to the Ombudsman's office. Early intervention to resolve cases without involving the Ombudsman's office would prove beneficial in progressing matters more swiftly, reducing the backlog which has been acknowledged by the Ombudsman's office and in identifying malicious or especially detailed cases. It is agreed that government agencies also need to make changes and introduce complementary processes to facilitate more efficient liaison with the Ombudsman's office.

Any attempts to rationalise the maze of public administration appeal mechanisms would be a positive step towards promoting the real value and positive public perception of the Ombudsman's office and would be supported wherever possible by Central Queensland University.

Recommendations

Recommendation 6:

The proposal for a concerted drive to make the community and government agencies more aware of the roles, including powers, and limitation on powers, of the Queensland Ombudsman is a positive step towards educating the general public. Enhanced awareness may lead to more efficient use of the Ombudsman's office and functions thereof. An Ombudsman's homepage on the Internet would be beneficial in what is apparently an age of technology.

Recommendation 8:

Establishment of a network across the state of officers able to provide information, advice, training and to deal with preliminary matters would greatly enhance both perceptions of and real contact with the Ombudsman's office. Access to appropriate training would be welcomed in the Central Queensland region. An online service would be efficient, considering the distances in some remote western regions.

Recommendation 9:

Participation as an adviser on reference groups established to design new policy initiatives with a view to minimising the potential for administrative indiscretion and maladministration would be encouraged by Central Queensland University. Past experience suggests that often cases of maladministration or administrative indiscretion are inadvertent and often due to a lack of knowledge of existing requirements. Central Queensland University has spent considerable time and resources addressing such a complaint, which is still being considered by the Ombudsman's office. It is apparent that a better informed administration would prevent such instances recurring. The participation of an Ombudsman's office representative on some University policy committees would be well utilised on an ad hoc basis.

Recommendation 18:

Early intervention and identification of complaints which do not require a full investigation would be beneficial to both the Ombudsman's office and to government agencies. Previous experience has demonstrated that early intervention would have enabled more swift resolution of complaints. Present processes do not allow for ready identification of those complaints which could be more readily resolved. To that end, agencies are often delayed in responding to allegations or requests for information, as the process in use at present dictates a comprehensive and often time consuming exchange of written information.

Recommendation 29:

Any attempt to streamline and diminish the number of administrative appeal mechanisms in Queensland would attract the cooperation of Central Queensland University. Incorporating new avenues of appeal into the Ombudsman's office appears to be the most sensible step towards achieving a central point for administrative appeal processes. It is important to achieve a level of uniformity across such appeal processes and locating all processes in the one office would be a strategic step towards achieving that uniformity.

Central Queensland University welcomes the opportunity to assist the Ombudsman's office in devising new approaches and procedures in order to streamline the functions of and enhance the public awareness of the office of the Ombudsman.

Yours sincerely



MJ Barrett
Freedom of Information Coordinator
Central Queensland University