OFFICE of the UNIVERSITY

Ombudsperson

2022-23

ANNUAL REPORT

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MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM OMBUDSPERSON

I am pleased to present the 2022-23 Annual Report for the Office of the University Ombudsperson, which covers the period from August 1, 2022 through July 31, 2023.

I would like to begin by giving a thank you to Lavonne Hood who served as the Ombudsperson up to June 1, 2023. Lavonne's hard work and dedication were instrumental in laying the foundation for the current Ombuds office. I am grateful for all that Lavonne did during her time as the Ombuds, and I wish her continued success in her role as Acting Associate Vice-Principal (Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion) in the Human Rights and Equity Office.

Although I only started in my new role as the Interim University Ombudsperson on June 1, 2023, I joined the Office in September 2022 as the Associate Ombudsperson, and understand the significant importance of the Ombuds office as a resource for students, staff and faculty at Queen's.

The 2022-23 Annual Report provides a summary and highlights of the work of the Office during this timeframe. Statistical summaries are provided for this year as well as comparables from the last four and the Year in Review section provides a summary of the work done including a formal report with recommendations to one Faculty. Also included in this report is a brief preview of some of the objectives that my team and I hope to accomplish over the coming year.

It is my honour to serve the Queen's community as your Interim University Ombudsperson.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Trojek
Interim University Ombudsperson

WHO WE ARE

The Office of the University Ombudsperson is an important resource to the Queen's community in helping students, staff, faculty, parents, and alumni understand policies and procedures within the university and identifying opportunities for improvement.

The staff in the Ombuds Office:

- help ensure procedural fairness in decision-making
- provide general advice to Queen's community members about their rights and responsibilities
- provide guidance on procedures to follow
- refer enquirers to relevant university offices or publications
- recommend changes to university policies and procedures
- provide training and educational tools
- identify systemic issues

Heather Trojek, *Interim University Ombudsperson*
Aimee Burtch, *Communications & Outreach Manager*
Kathryn Morrissey, *Intake Coordinator*

For more information, visit
www.queensu.ca/ombuds/who-we-are

OFFICE of the UNIVERSITY
Ombudsperson

WHAT WE DO

YOUR IMPARTIAL RESOURCE PROMOTING FAIRNESS AT QUEEN'S

The key principles guiding the role of the Office of the Ombudsperson are **independence**, **confidentiality**, and **impartiality**.

The central role of our office is to **help ensure procedural fairness in university decision making**.

The Ombudsperson and all staff working within the Office are precluded from acting as advocates as we have no case management role. Rather, **we facilitate fair processes within the university**. The Office provides general advice to community members about their rights and responsibilities and provides guidance on the procedures to follow. We also proactively review policies, procedures and decision-making frameworks of the university and **identify opportunities for systemic improvement**.

with **confidentiality**, and **impartiality** to concerns about **fair processes** at the university

with advice and **resources** to help understand **policies** and **procedures**

students, staff, and faculty to **navigate** through university decision-making

STATISTICS AT A GLANCE

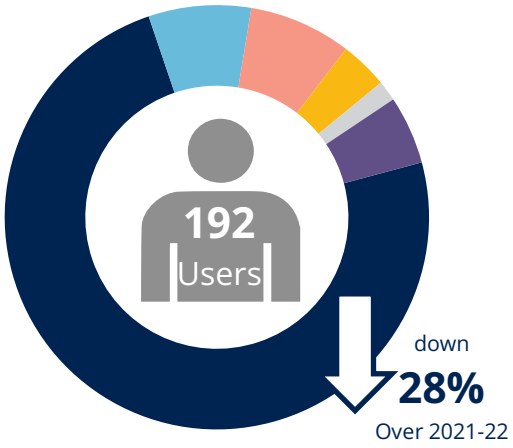
AUGUST 1, 2022, THROUGH JULY 31, 2023

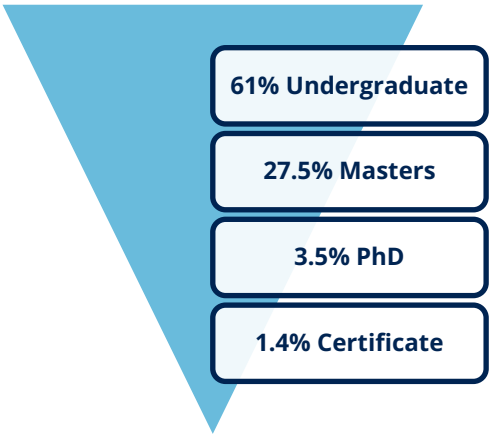
Over the course of the year, we had 192 individuals connect with the Office for direct advice and support. While this is a 28% decrease over 2021-22, this was expected due to the work that has been done with Faculties and Schools to update language that references and directs students on how to access our resources in a more consistent manner. The decrease in direct inquiries is mirrored by a substantial increase in the use of the on-line tools and training provided by our Office, which self-powers users to directly access information and resources without having to contact us.

The following charts show the breakdown of our Office users, the nature of their inquiries, and the support provided to them:

Type of User

- **Student (74%)**
- **Staff (9.8%)**
- **Parents (4.3%)**
- **Faculty (3.5%)**
- **Alum (1.6%)**
- **Other (5.2%)**



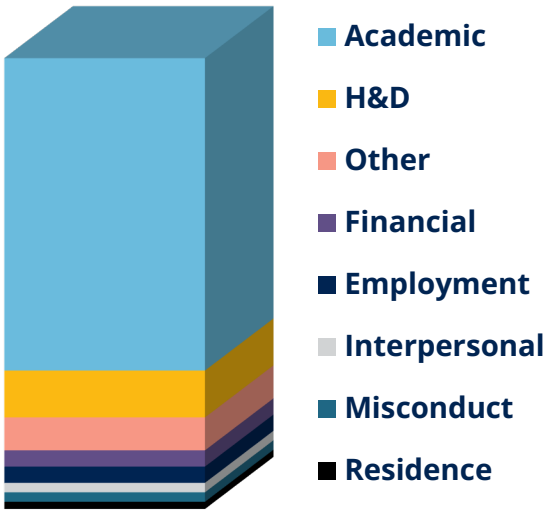


61% of students were undergraduate students

84% of users were new to the Office

100% used e-mail as primary contact method

Nature of Inquiry



Academic: Specific Nature of Concern

32.3% Academic Integrity

26.3% Appeals

25.6% Course or Program

11.3% Accommodations

2.3% Admissions

2.3% Other Academic Concerns

Users are classified on the nature of the inquiry for which they contacted the Office and were each assigned a broad category to give a more general overview of the nature of the concern. In some categories, a more specific nature of concern was assigned by using sub-categories.

Academic inquiries continued to be the most frequent topic. Within the academic inquiries received, the top three topics of inquiry were academic integrity, appeals and those surrounding a specific course or program.

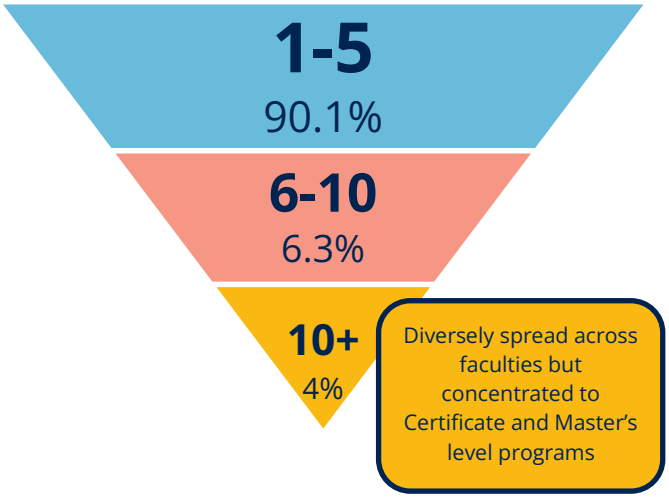
Examples of inquiries included questions around what to do upon receiving a Notice of Investigation and associated next steps, seeking guidance on the appropriate appeal process or the appeal letter itself, or seeking clarification on a particular policy that applied to their situation.

Student Users by Faculty

Faculty	Office User %	Enrolment %
Arts & Science	21.1%	47.5%
Health Sciences	16.9%	4.3%
Graduate Studies	15.5%	14.3%
Smith School of Business	12.7%	7.5%
Unknown	11.3%	N/A
Law	8.5%	2.3%
Engineering & Applied Science	7.0%	12.8%
Education	7.0%	1.9%

When comparing Faculty percentages with the Fall 2022 enrolment numbers at the University, a few Faculties and Schools were over-represented in terms of those who connected with the Office. Active outreach is undertaken to ensure policies and procedures are clear to students at the outset.

Average Points of Contact per User



While it is sometimes difficult to quantify the points of contact for each user, users were categorized by considering the number of e-mails exchanged as well as the amount of time spent exploring the matter further. This may include virtual meetings with the user, connecting with external partners or researching the applicable policy or procedure.

Actions Taken by Office

Website Quick Facts

Although our direct users were down by 28% the website data continues to confirm that many users directly accessed our website for information, which was a result of our ongoing outreach and communication efforts and efforts to collaborate with some of the largest Faculties and Schools on updating their language, both on websites and templated communications.

NEW

ANNUAL COMPARISON

ACADEMIC YEARS 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23

In 2019, following an external review and revised Terms of Reference, the Office of the University Ombudsperson was re-launched and started tracking statistics in a more intentional manner. With four academic years of full operation for the Office now complete, an annual comparison of statistics is possible, though the Office notes that only the most recent academic year may be considered typical. Due to the external factors surrounding the on-going pandemic in early 2020 and continuing through to early 2022 it's difficult to assess what is considered typical in terms of the number and types of inquiries.

INQUIRIES GROUPED BY USER TYPE

The following table displays the percentage of inquiries grouped by user type over the last four years. Students are the primary user of the Office, and we note that there's an increasing upward trend of individual inquiries from staff and faculty.

Staff & Faculty increase

Comparison: Inquiries by User Type

Year	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Student	74.0%	79.2%	76.6%	79.9%
Staff	7.8%	3.5%	1.7%	2.9%
Faculty	3.6%	1.6%	4.1%	2.7%
Alum	1.6%	1.6%	0.7%	1.3%
Parent/Guardian	7.8%	9.8%	7.8%	5.6%
Other	5.2%	4.3%	9.2%	7.5%

STUDENT INQUIRIES GROUPED BY FACULTY OR SCHOOL

The following table displays the percentage of student inquiries by Faculty or school over the last four years. As the data shows, the Faculty of Arts & Science is consistently the highest percentage, which is not surprising as they are the largest Faculty on campus. Though more recently there is a more diversity between Faculties and schools, the Office notes that some spikes in % are often due to a specific issue within a class.

Diverse spread

**An example of this can be seen in the Faculty of Engineering & Applied Science in 2019-20, where there was an academic integrity matter in one class that affected multiple students, many of whom contacted our office for support.*

Comparison: Student Inquiries by Faculty or School

Year	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Arts & Science	21.1%	38.6%	39.8%	22.0%
Education	7.0%	5.0%	1.3%	1.7%
Engineering & Applied Science	7.0%	5.0%	4.0%	**22.5%***
Graduate Studies	15.5%	6.9%	7.5%	4.0%
Health Sciences	16.9%	14.9%	17.3%	6.4%
Law	8.5%	5.0%	1.8%	0.0%
Smith School of Business	12.7%	13.4%	17.7%	8.1%
Unknown	11.3%	11.4%	10.6%	10.4%

INQUIRIES GROUPED BY NATURE OF CONCERN

The following table displays the percentage of inquiries grouped by nature of concern over the last four years. Users are classified on the nature of the inquiry for which they contacted the Office and were each assigned a broad category to give a more general overview of the nature of the concern. Academic inquiries are consistently the most common inquiry.

**The Office also notes the inclusion of the Harassment and Discrimination (H&D) classification in 2021-22 which was added after the Office was included as a resource in the updated Harassment and Discrimination Prevention and Response Policy.*

Comparison: Inquiries by Nature of Concern

Year	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Academic	69.3%	76.9%	79.0%	77.2%
Employment	0.0%	0.8%	0.7%	3.8%
Financial	2.2%	3.1%	2.4%	3.2%
H&D	**13.3%***	**2.0%***	N/A	N/A
Interpersonal	0.0%	3.1%	3.7%	3.5%
Misconduct	2.2%	3.9%	1.7%	4.3%
Residence	2.2%	2.4%	5.8%	1.3%
Other	13.3%	7.8%	6.8%	6.4%

INQUIRIES GROUPED BY ACADEMIC NATURE OF CONCERN

The following table displays the percentage of academic inquiries grouped by their sub-category over the last four years. The decrease to academic integrity inquiries and the increase in appeal inquiries over the last two years can be attributed to the updated language clarifying the role of the Office found within both the Student Academic Appeals Policy (SAAP) and the Academic Integrity Procedures - Requirements of Faculties & Schools, which were updated in 2021. The increase in inquiries related to a specific course or program can likely be attributed to the increasing awareness among students of the guidance our Office can provide, which in many cases includes a direct referral to staff within their home Faculty.

Comparison: Inquiries by Nature of Concern

Year	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Academic Standing	0.8%	0.0%	0.4%	3.1%
Academic Integrity	**32.3%**	**33.2%**	51.5%	55.6%
Accommodations	11.3%	4.1%	3.9%	3.8%
Admission	2.3%	5.1%	9.0%	3.8%
Appeal	**26.3%**	**33.2%**	19.7%	19.4%
Course or Program	25.6%	20.9%	15.0%	6.6%
Other Academic Concerns	1.5%	3.6%	0.4%	7.6%

YEAR IN REVIEW

This was the fourth full year of operation for the Office of the University Ombudsperson following the external review in 2019. The Ombuds staff worked remotely until the newly renovated office space was completed in March 2023.

From a multitude of office changes, the re-development of multiple asynchronous training modules, to countless virtual meetings with partners across campus, the themes of the 2022-23 academic year continued to be flexibility and adaptability. The Office participated in a variety of events, continued to support Faculties and Schools, actively engaged in a range of I-EDIAA opportunities, and developed and built relationships with a variety of on-campus partners and the broader Queen's community.

The following pages describe some of the above in more detail.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Terms of Reference**
- **Consider, investigate, and make recommendations**
- **Gaps or inadequacies identified from procedural fairness perspective**
- **Follow-up to provide support, promote change and foster accountability**

RECOMMENDATIONS

As per our Terms of Reference, a major function of the Office is to consider, investigate and make recommendations regarding complaints made by members of the university community.

When gaps or inadequacies in existing university policy and/or procedures are identified from a procedural fairness perspective, the Office is responsible for bringing them to the attention of the appropriate decision-making authority.

2022-23 Recommendations

Stemming from an intervention on an individual complaint, the Office provided a written report and multiple recommendations to a Faculty to update their regulations to promote fairness in their decision-making processes. The Office will provide follow-up and on-going support during the 2023-24 academic year.

YEAR IN REVIEW

OFFICE UPDATES

Throughout 2022-23 a number of items significantly impacted the day-to-day operations of the Office.

Associate Ombudsperson Hiring

In September 2022, the Office completed the hiring process for Heather Trojek, Associate Ombudsperson, to bring our total staff complement to four. Her role is to help to ensure the University community is served effectively by providing information, confidential and impartial advice, complaint and conflict resolution, consultation, investigation, and diplomacy.

Office Renovations Complete

Renovations were completed in March 2023 and most of the Office transitioned to a hybrid work environment in the new space in the D-wing of Macintosh-Corry Hall. An external display screen outside the office creates additional visual awareness for those passing by through rotational content.

OFFICE UPDATES

- **Associate Ombudsperson**
- **Office renovations complete**

YEAR IN REVIEW

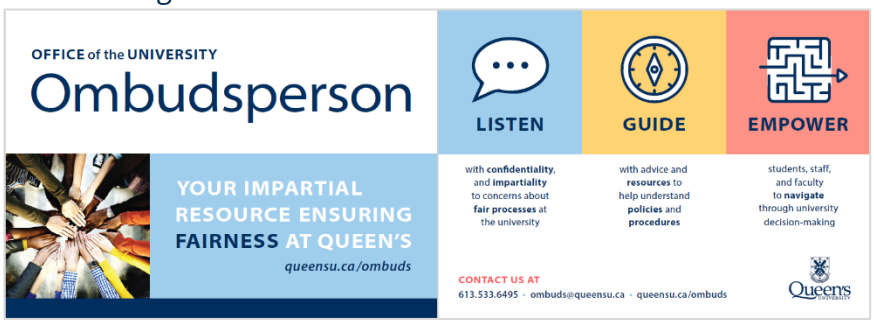
OFFICE UPDATES

- **Updated branding**
- **Shift in reporting portfolio**

Updated Branding Introduced

Following the release of the updated Queen's University Visual Identity Guide, the Office worked with Queen's University Relations to update our branding to ensure it was in compliance with both Queen's University standards as well as the most up to date accessibility guidelines.

Old Branding



New Branding

Reporting Portfolio Changed

As of June 1, 2023, the Office of the University Ombudsperson shifted to the new Office of the Vice-Principal (Culture, Equity and Inclusion) (VPCEI) portfolio. With this came significant changes as the Ombudsperson moved to the Human Rights and Equity Office as the Acting Associate Vice-Principal (Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion), and the Associate Ombudsperson stepped into the Interim Ombudsperson role.

YEAR IN REVIEW

TRAINING

Providing training opportunities to promote fairness across campus continues to be an annual priority. The goal of this training is to support consistency in decision-making in all Faculties and Schools, and to encourage fairness throughout each stage in the decision-making process. In addition, the following modules were also re-developed this year:

Ombudsperson Office Overview
An asynchronous module, targeted to staff, faculty, and student leaders, provides a generic overview of the Office, including what we do, who we are, common topics of inquiry, and guidance to partners. An additional section on a high-level overview of procedural fairness was added.

Fairness Training
While our focus has been promoting procedural fairness, it became clear that it is also important that decision-makers understand the steps they're taking when making the decision, as well as how they're treating those within the process. With that in mind, a significant re-development took place to update the existing procedural fairness module to incorporate both substantive fairness and relational fairness elements. The course will be launched in October 2023.

Decision-Maker Specific training with I-EDIIA lens
In collaboration with the University Secretariat and Legal Counsel and the Human Rights and Equity Office, content development of this new course specifically for decision-makers on campus is on-going. The course is expected to launch in winter 2024.

TRAINING

- **Re-development of current courses**
- **Fairness Asynchronous Module (updated)**
- **Ombudsperson Office Overview Training (updated)**
- **Decision-Maker Specific course with EDII lens (new)**

YEAR IN REVIEW

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The building of strong relationships and ensuring open communication with members of the Queen's community is key to allowing the Office to be able to function efficiently and is even more important while we continue to navigate working remotely. We would like to thank the Faculties and Schools, along with all our campus partners for their ongoing dialogue and support, with special mention to the partners listed below.

Partners that directly support the mandate of the Office:

- Lon Knox, General Counsel
- Stephanie Simpson, Vice-Principal (Culture, Equity, and Inclusion)
- Audit & Risk Committee of the Board of Trustees
- University Culture Committee of the Board of Trustees
- Ombuds Academic Appeal Advisors
    - Alan Abelson
    - Donald Sackey

In 2022-23, new and continuing initiatives and committee work included:

- Advisory Committee on Academic Accommodations
- Academic Integrity Regulations, Roundtable and Sub-Group
- Human Rights Legislative Group
- Non-Academic Misconduct Roundtable (Chair)
- Policy Advisory Subcommittee
- Rector Advisory Committee
- Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Task Force
- Student Services and Operations Sub-Group
- University Council on Anti-Racism and Equity (UCARE)
- Inclusive Community - UCARE Sub-Council

Our student partnerships across campus included:

- Alma Mater Society (AMS)
- Society of Graduate & Professional Students (SGPS)
- Smith Commerce Society (ComSoc)

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- **Committee Meetings**
- **Standing meetings with key campus partners**
- **Reciprocal communication with Faculties and Schools**
- **Presentations and events**

YEAR IN REVIEW

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- **Committee Meetings**
- **Standing meetings with key campus partners**
- **Reciprocal communication with Faculties and Schools**
- **Presentations and events**

Our campus partnerships across campus included:

- Human Rights & Equity Office
- Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre
- Office of Indigenous Initiatives
- University Relations
- University Counsel
- University Rector
- Student Affairs & Student Conduct Office

Professional associations:

- Association of Canadian College & University Ombudspersons (ACCUO)
- ACCUO Ad Hoc Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee
- ACCUO Professional Development Committee

Our gratitude to the 2022-23 Ombuds Advisory Committee:

- Lon Knox (Chair)
- Norma Barrett
- Owen Crawford-Lem
- Janice Hill
- Beth Langdon
- Lisa Newton
- Callum Robertson
- Stephanie Simpson

IMPORTANCE OF CREATING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

An important aspect of relationship building within the Office is the events, meetings, and discussions with partners across campus. When there is a complicated matter or concern that is brought to the attention of the Ombudsperson, such as a discrepancy with a current policy, or potential student issue, discussions happen between a variety of individuals to help mitigate future problems that may occur because of these concerns.

Typically, this included discussing what sort of process would be followed to ensure fairness is being considered and brainstorming practical options in order to find solutions or ways to move forward. Although these types of concerns are difficult to quantify, they can take up significant resources as the work often involves researching policies, crafting detailed e-mails, and meeting with multiple partners. They are an important part of the work the Office does and demonstrates the importance of continued relationship building.

YEAR IN REVIEW

INDIGENIZATION - EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, ANTI-RACISM, AND ACCESSIBILITY

With a specific mandate to help ensure fairness, Ombuds offices within post-secondary institutions are uniquely positioned to potentially have a positive impact on equity issues. The Office of the University Ombudsperson is committed to actively promoting I-EDIAA principles.

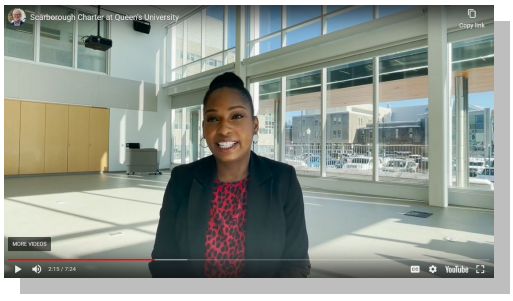
During the 2022-23 year, the Office engaged in activities to advance I-EDIAA objectives across campus, including:

Scarborough Charter: Teaching, Learning, and Student Success

The Scarborough Charter is a sector-wide agreement designed to move post-secondary institutions beyond rhetoric and towards more meaningful, concrete actions to address anti-Black racism and to promote inclusion and thriving of Black staff, faculty, and students.

There are four Scarborough Charter working groups at Queen's, and the Ombudsperson was co-lead of the Teaching, Learning, and Student Success working group.

The Ombudsperson was featured in a short video found on the website of the Office of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor speaking about what the Scarborough Charter meant to her as well as its potential impact for Queen's.



INDIGENIZATION - EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, ANTI-RACISM, AND ACCESSIBILITY (I-EDIAA)

- **Committee & policy work**

YEAR IN REVIEW

INDIGENIZATION - EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, ANTI-RACISM, AND ACCESSIBILITY (I-EDIAA)

- **Student event**
- **Reciprocal communication with partners**

Queen's Student Diversity Project: EMPOWER Conference

The Ombudsperson, Lavonne Hood, attended the EMPOWER Conference as one of the keynote speakers for the day. This annual conference was themed around empowering students to be comfortable and successful at the university.

Both high school and university students attended in-person or virtually to hear from speakers about the adversity they experienced and what they learned from it.

Together We Are: Community Post

The Human Rights and Equity Office at Queen's facilitates the '*Together We Are*' safe and collaborative space where dialogue and discussion occurs. The Ombudsperson wrote a piece in November of 2022, which she titled "The Scarborough Charter: From Striving to Thriving."

It was a personal, moving, and thought-provoking piece that allowed us to remain hopeful for what the future could look like for Black students, staff, and faculty here at Queen's.

WHAT'S NEXT?

As we reflect on the accomplishments of the past academic year, we find ourselves filled with appreciation for the dedication and hard work of our university community. It is with great enthusiasm that we turn our gaze toward the future, eagerly anticipating the possibilities that the upcoming academic year holds for us.

We are excited to introduce initiatives that will further strengthen our connection with the broader Queen's community. In the spirit of continuous improvement, we are working on projects that aim to increase education, enhance collaboration, streamline processes, and provide additional support to both students and faculty.

Some of the goals that align with the work that we are doing are:

- Undertake a review of our service standards, which will include the process for triaging and assessing for high-risk cases, and the implementation of a new file management system
- Partner with the new VPCEI portfolio to maximize resources, improve delivery, and reduce costs
- Develop, create, and market new training modules
- Review and revise the administrative functions of the Office to support fulfillment of the mandate of the Office
- Based on inquiries, conduct systemic reviews, resulting in formal reports and recommendations and follow-up

It is clear that the Office of the University Ombudsperson continues to be an important resource for the Queen's community and as we look ahead to 2022-23, we will continue to build on our first four years to provide invaluable support and resources to our students, staff and faculty.

OFFICE of the UNIVERSITY

Ombudsperson

Queen's UNIVERSITY

YOUR IMPARTIAL RESOURCE PROMOTING FAIRNESS AT QUEEN'S

queensu.ca/ombuds