

National Student Ombudsman

**Annual Report
2025–26**



Acknowledgement of Country

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia.

We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, for they hold the memories and traditions of the oldest living culture.

Artwork description

This artwork is a representation of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman by WA-based Whadjuk Nyungar Badimia Yamatji artist Kevin Bynder.

The centre of the artwork represents the colours of the Ombudsman. Outside the central circle are semi-circles that represent the people that work and have worked in the Ombudsman's Office. The coloured circles that surround the Ombudsman are the different sectors, such as overseas students, VET Student Loans, Defence Force, private health insurance, postal industry and immigration. These sectors are overseen by the Ombudsman and in the artwork are all connected to the centre. The blue features between each sector are the waterways and the Derbal Yerrigin (Swan River) created by the Waagyl (rainbow serpent). The red circles represent the businesses and people of the community we serve.



Credits

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Contact us

Annual report contact

For enquiries about the licence and any use of this report, email the contact officer for the National Student Ombudsman annual report at NSOoutreach@nso.gov.au.

General contact

If you would like to make a complaint or obtain further information about the National Student Ombudsman, contact us:

- online at nso.gov.au
- by phone on **1300 395 775** (note this is not a toll-free number and calls from mobile phones may attract additional charges)
- in writing to GPO Box 442, Canberra ACT 2601.

First Nations people can contact us on our Indigenous line at **1800 060 789**.

If English is not your first language, you can use the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS). This is a free-of-charge service available on **131 450**.

If you are Deaf/deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech difficulty, you can use the [National Relay Service](#) (NRS) to contact the National Student Ombudsman. Visit the NRS website or phone **1800 555 727**.

Services available to help you

Full Stop Australia is a confidential 24-hour support service for anyone in Australia who has been impacted by sexual, domestic or family violence. They can assist with providing information on safety planning, reporting options and referral pathways for trauma-specialist counselling. They can be contacted on **1800 385 578** anytime, or you can visit fullstop.org.au.

Relationships Australia is a not-for-profit provider of relationship support services catering to individuals, families and communities – this can include counselling, mediation services and facilitating a range of programs addressing family and domestic violence. They can be contacted on **1300 364 277**, or you can see relationships.org.au for more information.

Lifeline is a 24-hour crisis support service that can be accessed via telephone, SMS/texting service or online chat service. They can be reached by phone on **13 11 14**, text on **0477 131 114**, or by visiting lifeline.org.au.

QLife is a free peer support and referral service for LGBTIQIA+ people. They can be contacted on **1800 184 527** between 3pm and midnight, 7 days a week, or you can visit qlife.org.au.

13YARN is a confidential 24-hour crisis support service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They can be contacted on **13 92 76**, 7 days a week, or you can visit 13yarn.org.au.

Beyondblue is a 24-hour free mental health service. They can be contacted on **1300 224 636**, or you can visit beyondblue.org.au.

Medicare Mental Health (formerly Head to Health) is a free service that connects Australians with the mental health support that best suits their needs. They can be contacted on **1800 595 212** between 8:30am and 5pm weekdays, excluding public holidays. You can visit medicarementalhealth.gov.au for more information.

Letter of transmittal

6 October 2026

The Hon. Michelle Rowland MP
Attorney-General for Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Attorney-General,

I am pleased to present the National Student Ombudsman (NSO) Annual Report for 2025–26. This is the first opportunity for the NSO to report on a full 12 months of operations. This report has been prepared for the purposes of s 21AX of the *Ombudsman Act 1976* (Ombudsman Act), which requires that I prepare and provide an annual report to you for presentation to the Australian Parliament.

As required by s 21AX, the report includes:

- Information about the number and nature of complaints made to the NSO
- Information about investigations conducted by the NSO
- Information about recommendations made by the NSO
- Information about the referral of complaints to higher education providers
- Information about the NSO's use of alternative dispute resolution and restorative engagement processes
- Information about the NSO's actions to promote best practice complaints handling; and
- Details of the NSO's observations about trends in complaints and improvements that could be made to complaints handling by higher education providers.

The report also details other matters relevant to the operations of the NSO, including information about education activities, case studies and sector collaboration.

Yours faithfully,



Julie O'Brien
Acting National Student Ombudsman

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As the NSO forms part of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, performance reporting for the NSO under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* is included in the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman Annual Report for 2025–26.

Foreword – Commonwealth Ombudsman

The National Student Ombudsman (NSO) is an independent complaints handling service.

We focus on fairness in the delivery of higher education services for all students across Australia. We hold providers to account for the quality and safety of the student experience and shine a light on systems and processes in need of improvement.

This year was the NSO's first full year of operation, having only opened on 1 February 2025. Our annual report reflects the progress we have made in establishing the NSO as an independent oversight agency in the higher education sector.

The demand for NSO services grew, with 4,874 students contacting us this year, representing a 12% increase from our first 6 months of operation. We improved the effectiveness of our services, resolving 82% of contacts, significantly up from 43% in the previous financial year.

While 93% of complaints were able to be handled less formally using early resolution functions, the NSO also increased the use of its more formal investigation functions, including to highlight opportunities for systemic improvement. This year, we commenced 44 investigations, closed 23 and issued 30 recommendations, of which 93% were accepted by providers. We published our first Own Motion Investigation, *Can I Talk About This?*, which found that confidentiality clauses used by some providers in complaints and misconduct investigations could be restricting students from seeking support and discouraging them from making complaints. We encourage all providers to consider if they need to implement these recommendations to improve their complaint handling processes.



Iain Anderson, National Student Ombudsman

Students contacted the NSO about a broad range of complaint issues: from back-of-house administrative issues, such as delays in fee refunds, actioning course deferment or transfer, through to issues with how providers handled complaints about racism, discrimination and gender-based violence. We have seen providers willing to review processes, change decisions and accept that there are opportunities to improve their processes. While it is positive to see a number of providers adopting a continual improvement approach to complaints handling, at times we have seen providers respond with defensiveness and outsource serious complaint investigations to external providers without maintaining suitable responsibility for the process and the outcome. Overall, complaints to the NSO show there is still considerable room for improvement in how the sector handles, records, reports and learns from complaints, and more it can do to raise awareness of student complaints services.

I am privileged to wear many hats across the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, including that of National Student Ombudsman. I thank Sarah Bendall for her day-to-day leadership of our NSO function, and I thank all NSO staff for their ability to both draw on the experience of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman and to find their own ways to be impactful, impartial and committed to ensuring a quality higher education experience for all students.

At the NSO, we are committed to a culture of continuous improvement, just as we expect higher education providers to be. We will continue to mature all of our services to students and the higher education sector, and together we can work to improve the quality and safety of the student experience.

Introduction – First Assistant Ombudsman

It is a time of significant change and challenge across the higher education sector.

This means it's more important than ever for providers to focus on their students and the quality of their education services. Effective complaints handling helps providers to do this. Good complaints handling demonstrates accountability, transparency and fairness. It's an essential ingredient for governance and can contribute to boosting an institution's social licence. Most importantly, complaints offer the chance to hear directly from students about the quality and safety of provider services. A mature complaints system enables providers to resolve individual complaints and implement systems-level improvements to prevent similar complaints from recurring.



Sarah Bendall, First Assistant Ombudsman, NSO

Given NSO services are still newly forming, we focused this year on raising awareness of the NSO with students, establishing relationships across the higher education sector, maximising the value of our complaints services for students and providers and educating the sector on better complaints handling.

This report provides information on how we are delivering our different complaints handling services. It shares insights from student complaints through data and case studies and outlines NSO achievements over the last 12 months.

Across the thousands of student complaints we received this year, we learned that:

- Students are motivated to find a way for higher education to fit into their busy lives. For students, a high-quality education experience is one where their provider supports them to succeed.
- Students don't differentiate between their academic services and the back-of-house administrative services that enable their studies. For students, provider systems, processes and infrastructure to facilitate course administration are essential for high-quality higher education services. Forty-eight per cent of contacts to the NSO are from students frustrated that course administration processes are acting as barriers to their learning journey. Surely there is scope for providers to improve in this area.
- Students recognise the challenges for higher education services and staff. They complain, not to be demanding, but to ask to be heard and to be assured of fair decision-making. There is great potential for providers to better handle student complaints in the first instance, if staff are taught how to exercise discretion well and empowered to make decisions fairly.

It's been a great privilege to lead the NSO's first full year of operations. As this annual report shows, we have come a long way in a short time. The NSO is nothing without its remarkable staff, and I'm so grateful to them for their energy, creativity and commitment to making our services the best they can be for students and providers.

We, at the NSO, look forward to continuing to build our relationships with students, the sector and all of our stakeholders. We welcome everyone to join us in our mission to champion complaints handling as a way for providers to improve the quality of their services, improve relationships with students and help more students to realise the truly transformational power of higher education.

Year in review 2025–26



4,874

total student
contacts



81%

classified as
complaints



78%

TEQSA registered higher
education providers
had a complaint
recorded about them



12%

increase in
demand since
last year



116,500

total views
generated across
our social platforms



82%

of contacts
resolved



22

conciliation processes
commenced,
20 conciliation
agreements reached



250

engagement
activities
undertaken



3

educational webinars
facilitated, reaching over
2000 sector stakeholders, with
94.6% of attendees rating the
webinar positively



44

investigations commenced,
23 investigations finalised, **30**
recommendations made, **93%** of
recommendations accepted

Sector opportunities for improvement:



Clearer communication with students



Fairness, transparency and timeliness in complaints decision-making and processes



Implementing systems, and service improvements from individual complaints



Less adversarial complaints processes



Accountability for when things haven't gone well and acting to address it



More accurate and comprehensive complaint record keeping



Greater awareness of central complaints teams and processes, for both students, and staff advising students



Ensuring awareness of NSO as escalation point



Responding to NSO information requests in a timely and open way

Good things we've seen and want more of:



Good progress in implementing our recommendations



Providers undertaking robust investigations into serious allegations and taking appropriate actions



Willingness to make fairer decisions based on students' individual circumstances



Improvements to inclusion and accessibility training for staff



Using student feedback to inform redesign of administrative processes



Open and responsive engagement with NSO preliminary inquiries including updating policies to improve fairness ahead of an investigation commencing



Commitment to improving complaints handling as demonstrated through attendance at NSO education events



Staff with genuine commitment to a positive student experience, and openness to working with us

At a glance achievements 2025–26

**July
2025**

Attended 12 on-campus events across Australia for second semester intake, creating greater visibility of our services and providing an opportunity to build trust and connect with students at a meaningful time in their student experience.

Created a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the NSO and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) MoU's reduce regulatory burden for providers and reduces potential harm caused when students are requested to retell their stories.

**August
2025**

**September
2025**

- Strong early demand for NSO services with 3000th contact recorded since establishment
- Undertook a regional circuit visit to Tasmania, creating opportunity for Hobart based students to have in-person appointments and to increase awareness of our services to student union, support services, residential accommodation, and university staff.

- Published our inaugural Annual Report covering the first five months of operations.
- Issued the first NSO complaint investigation report privately to a provider with recommendations covering individual complaint outcomes and systems level improvements for provider practice.

**October
2025**

**November
2025**

Released a public statement on cyber incidents following reports of compromised student facilities and incidents in online forums encouraging providers to place accountability, transparency and support for students at the centre of their response.

Published our Statement of Commitment and Statement of Expectations to higher education providers to clearly explain how we will work with them within our jurisdiction when carrying out our functions and what we expect from our engagements.

**December
2025**

**January
2026**

Expressions of Interest opened for the NSO's Education Advisory Group seeking experienced complaint handlers from the higher education sector to support the NSO in its work to education the sector on better practice complaints handling.

- Celebrated 1 year of NSO operations and continued demand with 5000th contact since establishment
- The NSO partnered with the Department of Education (DoE) and the newly established Gender-based Violence Regulator (GBVR) to attend 25 on-campus events across the country, promoting the NSO services and what the establishing of the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence (2025) means for students.

**February
2026**

**March
2026**

- Published our first Own Motion Investigation (OMI) report, *Can I Talk About This? The use of confidentiality requirements in university complaints handling*, making 7 recommendations to higher education providers.
- Issued a public statement on an investigation, *Walk the Talk*, which provided lessons for the sector on the importance of not just commissioning gender-based violence prevention process reviews, but prioritising the implementation of recommendations from these reviews.
- Ran our first webinar for the higher education sector on how to deliver trauma-informed complaint handling.

Established the NSO Student Collective to deepen the connection with higher education students, recognising the importance of hearing and responding to voices not always present in mainstream forums.

**April
2026**

**May
2026**

Ran a webinar for the sector on our Own Motion Investigation, "Can I Talk About This? The use of confidentiality requirements in university complaints handling".

Ran our third webinar for the sector focused on de-escalation techniques in student complaint handling.

**June
2026**

About us

Our authority

The Australian Parliament passed legislation on 28 November 2024 establishing the NSO under Part IIF of the *Ombudsman Act 1976*.

Under the Ombudsman Act, the NSO can deal with complaints about higher education providers that are registered with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). This does not include vocational education and training (VET) providers.

The Australian higher education sector includes public and private universities, Australian branches of overseas universities, university colleges and institutes of higher education.

Higher education providers are those that offer undergraduate qualifications (bachelor degrees, associate degrees and advanced diplomas) and postgraduate awards (graduate certificates and diplomas, and master’s and doctoral degrees).

Our team

Figure 1: Organisational chart

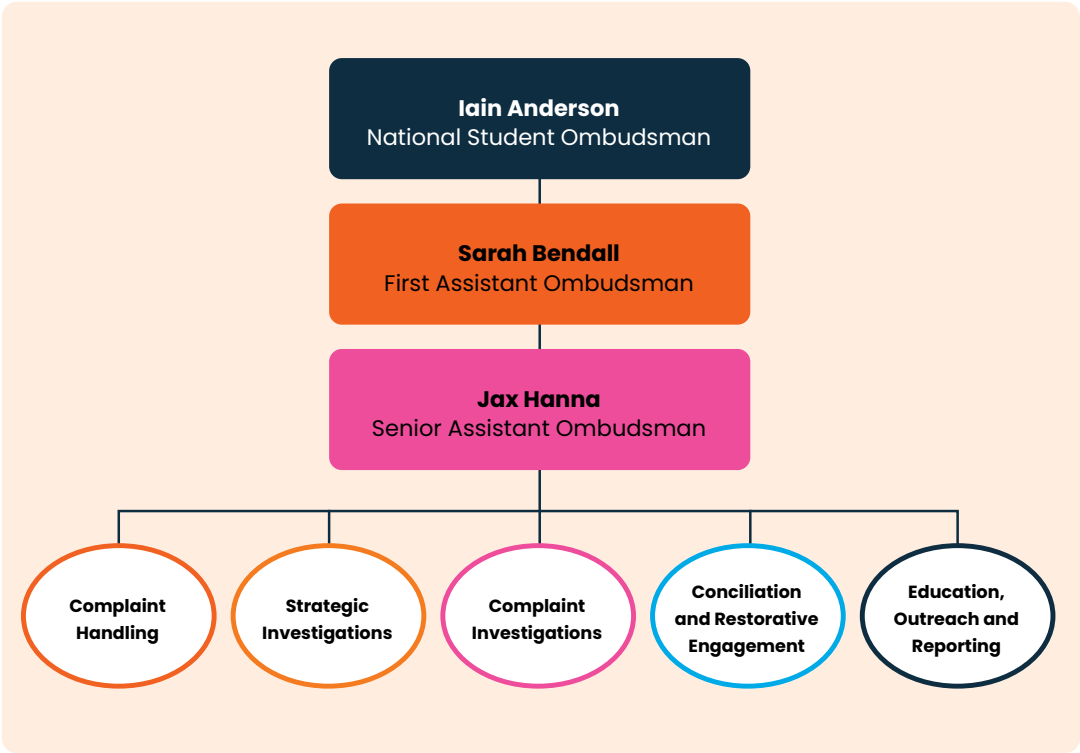
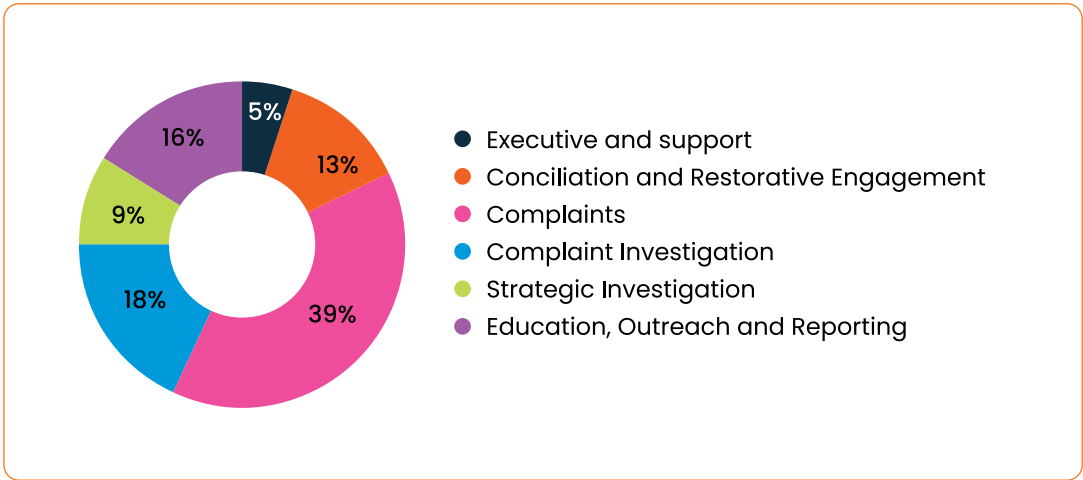


Figure 2: NSO Branch staffing



Our work

The National Student Ombudsman (NSO) is an independent and impartial service for prospective, current and former higher education students to escalate their complaints about the actions of their higher education providers.

Students can complain to the NSO about a broad range of issues, including how their provider has handled their complaints about:

- discrimination
- racism
- accessibility of student services for students with a disability
- gender-based violence
- administrative processes
- teaching quality
- student accommodation.

The NSO handles complaints through facilitating an informal resolution, conciliation or restorative engagement, or more formal investigation pathways. The NSO achieves individual student outcomes while also influencing systemic improvements.

The NSO has an education function designed to provide advice and training to higher education providers on handling complaints.

Student complaint insights

4,874

contacts



81%

classified as complaints



4,009

contacts closed



10%



classified as contacts
and/or enquiries

10%

were classified as
out-of-jurisdiction



Demographics



57% Domestic,
43% international



67% undergraduate,
33% Postgraduate



82% University,
18% Non-University
providers



2% identified as
First Nations students



15% identified as student
with disability

4% Prospective students

74% Current student

22% Past students



This chapter provides an overview of student complaint issues to the NSO in the 2025–26 financial year. It sets out complaint issues by category and outlines 6 key insights from student complaints.

When a complaint is made to the NSO, we assess and prioritise. We record the complaint issue category and sub-issues. Often one complaint has multiple issues, and each individual issue will be recorded. The recording of these issues provides valuable insights on what concerns students the most.

Students contacted the NSO about a variety of issues impacting their education experience, from back-of-house administrative issues to racism and discrimination, lack of support related to gender-based violence and academic performance. The breadth of issues reported to the NSO demonstrates the complex lives of students, many of whom are juggling work and study, cost of living pressures, visa requirements, evolution of technology, and culture, identity and inclusion.

Poor course administration services is the most common complaint category, continuing to represent about one third of all complaints to the NSO. The types of issues in this complaint category range from applications of special consideration to enrolment, withdrawal and graduation. A small rise in complaints related to fees and financial issues means that nearly half (48%) of all complaints to the NSO are related to back-of-house administrative services. What could be perceived as a ‘minor’ administrative error can have a big impact on the student. In doing the basics well and managing those back-of-house administrative services, providers can build trust and create a pathway for students to raise matters of safety, discrimination and racism.

Figure 3: Complaint issues

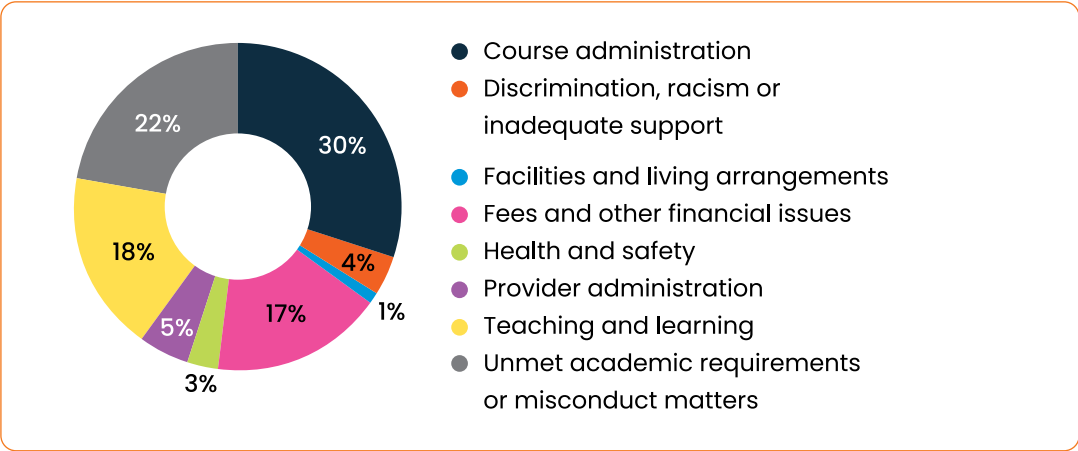


Table 1: Detailed breakdown of complaint issues

Issue type	Count of issue	% of total
Course administration	1,318	30%
Application and admission	127	3%
Certification and graduation	147	3%
Course structure, design and availability	200	5%
Enrolment, deferment and intermission	171	4%
Inaccurate or misleading information	57	1%
Recognition of prior learning	111	3%
Special consideration	283	6%
Transfer	58	1%
Withdrawal	164	4%
Discrimination, racism or inadequate support	172	4%
Discrimination	103	2%
Inadequate support	42	1%
Racism/vilification	27	1%
Facilities and living arrangements	42	1%
Accommodation	33	1%
Buildings, grounds and facilities	9	0%
Fees and other financial issues	750	17%
Fees	390	9%
HECS-HELP	1	0%
Refunds	320	7%
Scholarships	39	1%
Health and safety	139	3%
Abuse, threats and violence (not GBV)	10	0%
Bullying and harassment	39	1%
Gender-based violence	84	2%

Issue type	Count of issue	% of total
Retaliation	6	0%
Provider administration	200	5%
IT and digital services	33	1%
Privacy/Personal Information	19	0%
Provider and student organisations	14	0%
Support services (non-academic)	134	3%
Teaching and learning	797	18%
Academic support services	29	1%
Assessment	361	8%
Learning plan/adjustment plan	53	1%
Learning resources	10	0%
Placement/Workplace Integrated Learning	201	5%
Quality of teaching or course content	94	2%
Supervision	49	1%
Unmet academic requirement or misconduct matter	978	22%
Academic performance	501	11%
Attendance	113	3%
Misconduct (academic)	260	6%
Misconduct (non-academic)	104	2%
Grand Total	4,396	100%

Insight 1: Providers’ administrative actions are still student services and should not act as barriers to students’ education experience

Figure 4: Administrative complaints comparison



When complaints of **course administration and financial issues** are combined, these back-of-house matters make up nearly half (48%) of all complaints to the NSO. These are seemingly small matters, but when dealt with poorly, they have a significant impact on the student’s life and can break trust between student and provider.

Figure 5: Percentage of administration related complaints

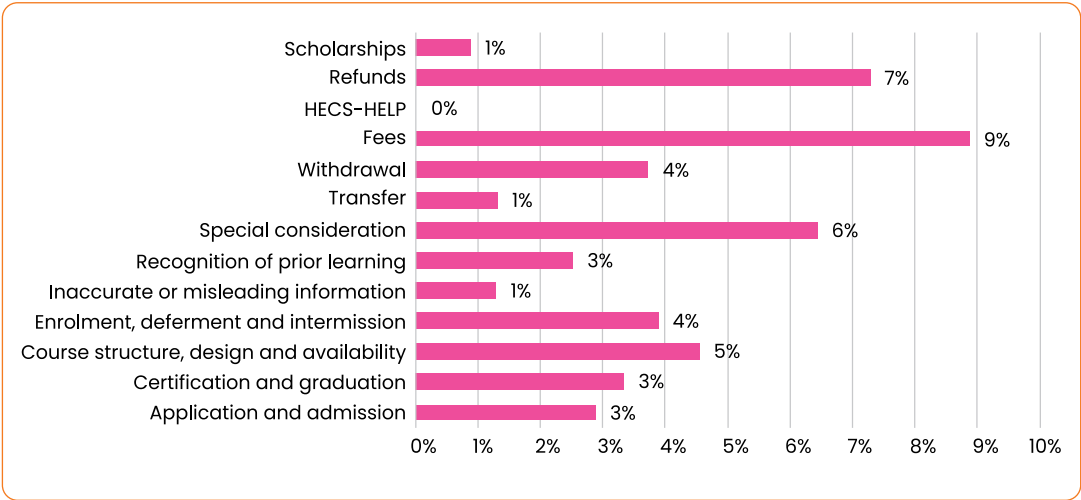


Figure 5 shows the breakdown of complaints about course administration and financial issues by percentage of total student issues. In practice, these issues represent thousands of students who have contacted the NSO out of frustration with provider back-of-house issues acting as barriers to their student learning.

Complaints regarding **course administration** continue to be the most common complaint category, consisting of 1,318 complaints, 30% of all complaints reported to us. This was largely consistent across complaints received from both domestic and international student cohorts.

The most common sub-issue was complaints about **special consideration applications**, with students feeling that their applications were unfairly rejected. Students felt that higher education providers made determinations either without taking their extenuating circumstances into account or not providing clarity around the evidentiary requirements to support these applications.

The second most common sub-issue was complaints about **course structure, design and availability**. Many students reported that course restructures that happened after their initial enrolment led to inadvertent academic overloads or changes to mandatory practical requirements. Students reported that these occurred without adequate notification or consultation. Some also reported that they were not given information regarding teach-out mode or offered feasible alternatives to minimise adverse impacts.

Other matters that concerned students included issues around **certification and graduation**, in addition to concerns relating to applications to update enrolment, requests for deferral and/or intermission. We see a significant number of complaints where late discontinuation based on special consideration has been rejected, and the student then applies for fee remission.

Complaints recorded about **fees and other financial issues** constituted 17% of all complaints. Over half were general fee-related complaints, including those regarding HELP liability, but they also extended to issues around requests for refund (including refund of course fees and/or prepaid tuition fees). Almost 28% of complaints received from students at non-university providers related to fees.

In line with observations seen in our first 5 months of operations, international students continued to make complaints to the NSO regarding fees or financial issues, especially in relation to refund requests. Complaints regarding prepaid tuition fees show that the international student cohort had nearly 8% more complaints under this category compared to the domestic students.

Opportunities for improvement

In the NSO's view, many of the complaints about course administration, fees and financial issues should not need to come to the NSO in order to be resolved. They should be resolved through the provider's internal process.

Below are suggestions for improvements that providers can implement:

- Use complaints to identify and implement service improvements, engage positively when a student wants to fix an issue, and create a culture of continual improvement.
- Provide greater awareness of enrolment status and withdrawal processes. This includes proactive support for students not engaging with the course or at risk of failing before census date.
- Be timely, transparent and accurate in providing information about complaints, appeals, general enquiries and course updates. Consider the flow-on effect, particularly when it impacts students' course progression and may extend course completion time or impact graduation.
- Consider special circumstances policies and processes, and how students experience these. Make sure staff are trained in making fair, reasonable and consistent decisions and can clearly explain decisions to students, including why they were made, what evidence was relied on and what the student's options are.
- Issue student refunds fairly and quickly, in accordance with the law, especially the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000*. This includes fairness and timeliness in applying fee policies and processing withdrawals.

Case study

Thorough consideration of student enquiries – administrative issues

Yuechan* is a first-year student juggling work and full-time online study. Before the census date, Yuechan withdrew from one unit of study to better manage her work and study load and applied for a refund of pre-paid tuition fees.

Yuechan referenced the relevant policy and met all timeframe requirements. However, she did not receive the refund. Yuechan emailed her provider multiple times and was repeatedly advised the refund had been processed. After 2 months, Yuechan still hadn't received an explanation as to why the money had not been received, and the provider stopped replying to her emails. Yuechan needed the refund to assist with daily living expenses.

Yuechan called the NSO to ask for help. Yuechan provided copies of email correspondence with her provider as well as financial evidence to show the refund had not been received. The NSO contacted the provider asking for clarification about Yuechan's refund, information about their fee refund process, and the lack of communication that Yuechan had reported.

The provider advised the NSO that our request for information had led them to find an error in their fee refund process, where the refund had been incorrectly provided to a student with a similar name. The provider immediately issued the refund to Yuechan, apologised for the delay and committed to implement administrative improvements to financial processes to ensure accuracy of refunds.

Key learnings

Complaints like Yuechan's should not need to come to the NSO. While the issue was rectified eventually, providers should ensure they have robust processes. By listening to students and ensuring the investigation of administrative issues is thorough, matters, such as the refund explained in this case study, can be resolved quickly and keep trust kept with students. Providers need to consider applying learnings from individual complaints to create systemic change through amending process and policy.

Case study

Compassionate and compelling circumstances – special consideration

Amita* is a domestic student studying a Bachelor of Finance. After moving interstate from a rural community to an urban university, Amita began to feel isolated and depressed being far away from her family and support system.

Amita began to miss classes and submitted assessments past their due dates, which resulted in her academic progress dropping below the required pass rate and the university deciding to exclude her from further study.

Amita decided to appeal the exclusion under compassionate and compelling circumstances. However, she was unable to book an appointment with a medical practitioner to get supporting documents within the timeframe outlined in the appeal process. The university upheld the decision to exclude Amita.

Amita came to the NSO, as she did not believe sufficient consideration had been given to her personal circumstances, and the appeal policy timeframe did not take into account the wait times for appointments with medical practitioners.

After the NSO contacted the university, they extended the timeframe for Amita to submit supporting documents for her appeal that highlighted the challenges she faced with her mental health and feelings of isolation. Upon re-assessment, the university reversed their decision to exclude Amita, allowing her to re-enrol in the next semester.

Key learnings

Students often report they feel unheard during appeal processes, with their personal circumstances not taken into consideration. Timeframes in appeal processes are often short and do not account for barriers students may face when gathering evidence. When a student's academic progress begins to decline, providers should ensure students are aware of support services outside academic support, in recognition of complexities students face when studying.

Insight 2: Complaints about unmet academic requirement are complex; providers should review their systems and processes to ensure they are fair and accessible and should reflect on whether they are doing enough for student retention

Academic performance is the single most common complaint sub-category, accounting for 11% of all complaints to the NSO. Complaints about this issue have been consistently high since the NSO commenced in February 2025, with students often reporting that personal circumstances hindered their ability to perform academically, but this was difficult to convey to their providers. The majority of these complaints (63%) are from international students.

Students come to the NSO in circumstances of significant stress and uncertainty, particularly where they are concerned that their academic progress may result in serious consequences, like the potential loss of their enrolment or, for international students, the reporting of unsatisfactory progress and implications for their visa status.

A single complaint type with such significant numbers is something for both the NSO and providers to consider. We recognise the connection between the administration processes (entry, proper education agent behaviour with full financial backing to successfully study) and the academic process (genuine progress and minimum requirements). This requires connected management across several teams within a single institution, and consideration of why the current support structure is not adequately supporting international students who are struggling with academic performance.

The prominence of this complaint type is not unexpected given the significant academic and regulatory requirements placed on students, particularly international students.

One key lesson is that early and effective engagement with students who are at risk of not meeting academic requirements is critical. The process must be student centred and safe. Providers need to support students to understand, well before a formal academic outcome is reached, what is expected of them, where they are falling short, what support is available and what steps they can take to improve their position. This communication should be clear, timely and delivered through multiple channels, where appropriate.

Early intervention also provides an opportunity to identify issues affecting a student's academic performance and ensures that students understand relevant special consideration, review and appeal processes. For international students in particular, proactive communication can help reduce the uncertainty and distress associated with academic progression decisions and may prevent students from needing to seek external assistance only after a significant academic outcome has occurred.

Unpacking what support is provided, why the support hasn't helped and whether the student understood the process is required to better understand this issue and what can be changed within every provider's processes to better support more students to successfully complete their studies.

Case study

Support is available – unmet academic requirements

Sanja* is an international student undertaking study in a foundations/bridging program with her higher education provider.

Sanja experienced some personal disruptions earlier in her studies, including an unplanned accommodation change. Following this, Sanja had lower attendance and missed assessment deadlines, impacting her ability to meet satisfactory progress requirements as per her visa conditions.

At the start of the study period, the provider encouraged all international students to use the free academic support sessions, which include information about course requirements, counselling services, financial hardship programs and social engagement opportunities.

Given the ongoing concerns about Sanja's academic progress, the provider sent multiple emails, but she failed to respond. The provider also called Sanja to try and set up a meeting to review her progress. After no response to the repeated attempts at communicating with Sanja, the provider commenced action to cancel Sanja's Confirmation of Enrolment (CoE) and reported the breach of conditions to the Department of Home Affairs (DoHA). Following cancellation action, Sanja subsequently contacted her provider asking for her CoE to be re-instated and filed an internal appeal.

After her appeal was rejected, Sanja escalated her complaint to the NSO. In reviewing evidence provided by both Sanja and the provider, the NSO found the provider had:

- taken reasonable steps to contact Sanja
- made concerted effort to support Sanja in her return to studies
- acted in accordance with its policies and legal obligations.

Sanja did not provide evidence to demonstrate that she had made attempts to respond to the provider or that she had taken actions to manage her course progression. She also provided no explanation as to why she may not have been responsive to the provider.

Personal difficulties can arise without warning and impact on one's ability to fully engage with their studies. However, international students should take care to respond to providers' communication in a timely manner. Providers can provide early intervention measures, including wellbeing and counselling support, to help students get back on track.

Key learnings

This case highlights the importance of student engagement, in understanding their obligations when studying in Australia, and the provider's responsibility to document and follow due process when managing attendance and course progress-related issues.

Case study

Clearer communication – academic performance

During Semester 1, one of James' children became sick, requiring a short period of hospitalisation to support their recovery. Due to this additional challenge, James missed a number of emails from the university notifying him of his lack of academic progress and being at risk of suspension if his results did not improve.

James did not realise he had been suspended for a lack of academic progress until he was unable to enrol in Semester 2 classes. By this time, he had missed the university's timeframe in which to lodge an appeal.

James contacted the NSO seeking to be re-enrolled in his course. The NSO contacted the university to ask them if they would allow James to engage in the appeal process, which would afford James the opportunity to explain how his carer responsibilities impacted his studies.

The university agreed to this and, after consideration, allowed James to re-enrol under probationary conditions that he engage with the academic support services and improve his results for Semester 2.

Additionally, the university agreed to improve their communications by avoiding generalised emails when alerting students to serious matters. Instead, the university will work towards tailored messaging that alerts students to respond and engage with support early.

Key learnings

Student engagement drops when stress levels rise, making it harder for them to follow university processes and communications. Introducing support tools, key processes and the importance of checking official communications during early induction gives students critical information before assessments begin.

To maintain student enrolment and educational outcomes, providers should ensure that important information is accessible and clearly distinguishable from routine campus updates.

Insight 3: For teaching and learning, most students report issues with placements and assessments

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and professional placements continued to generate complaints from students, specifically with concerns about placement allocation, communication, supervision, assessment and the impact of placement decisions on their course progression. The NSO received 203 complaints relating to placements, which accounted for 5% of all NSO complaints, cementing this as a significant issue experienced by students around the country. Placement complaints are often complex, because they involve relationships between higher education providers, host organisations, such as hospitals or schools, and students. Delays or changes to placement arrangements, and poor responses to complaints about these, can affect students' ability to complete mandatory course requirements, extend the duration of study, and create additional financial or personal burden.

The NSO often hears from students who face uncertainty regarding this mandatory part of their study and difficulties in both location and timing, with some placements not being confirmed until only a few days before they are due to start.

Providers should strengthen communication about placement availability and expectations, transparency in allocation and assessment processes, support for students experiencing difficulties during placements, and timely resolution of concerns before they affect academic progression.

The NSO observed examples of providers responding constructively to complaints by reviewing placement decisions, improving communication and implementing administrative changes to reduce the likelihood of similar complaints in the future. As the NSO continues to respond to complaints about placement issues with a focus on achieving system change, placement experiences for students should improve and allow for timely course progression with less disruption and fewer negative impacts.

Assessment-related complaints were also a significant concern, representing 8% of all complaints received. Students raised concerns about issues including the fairness and transparency of assessment processes, the adequacy and timeliness of feedback and the application of assessment criteria. Complaints relating to assessment have significant consequences for students, particularly where the outcomes affect progression or continuing enrolment.

While the NSO may consider complaints about assessment policies and processes, it cannot review matters of academic judgement, such as the merit of a student's work or the marks awarded. Providers should ensure processes for academic review are accessible and safe for students and clearly explain the formal appeal process.

The NSO expects to see quality of teaching increasingly become an area of focus over the next couple of years in the higher education sector. There is acknowledged complexity surrounding the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) by students in their assessments and how these are considered by providers. On the other hand, the NSO has observed commentary from students about the use of AI in the creation of the course and learning material and/or the extent to which it is used in the development of learning plans.

Case study

Transparency in marking and moderation – assessment

Mark* is a postgraduate student studying a Master of Psychology.

Mark raised several concerns about the quality of marking and teaching. Mark believed that the educators marking the assignments were biased and not following the marking rubric, resulting in a lower-than-expected final grade. Mark also believed the feedback was generic and provided little value.

Mark had discussed this with other students in the course, and many agreed there was an issue, leading them to lodge a group complaint with the Academic Dean. The group complaint was dismissed by the Dean, leaving Mark with unanswered questions.

Mark contacted the NSO to escalate the complaint. Mark attached evidence of the group complaint and response from the Dean. Although a group complaint had been made, the NSO formed the view that Mark should try raising his concerns directly with his provider, through the resolution pathways available. The NSO sought consent from Mark to share his concerns with his provider. The NSO asked the provider to engage with Mark directly to explain the resolution options available to him. In this instance, the direct communication between Mark and his provider was essential to resolve the dispute.

The provider called Mark and, through their discussions, was able to address Mark's concerns, confirming that the marking had been through multiple moderation processes prior to marks being provided.

Key learnings

Transparency about assessment and marking processes is important in supporting students to understand how their academic work is assessed. Clear information about marking criteria, moderation processes and how assessment outcomes are determined can help manage student expectations and reduce uncertainty about whether assessment practices are applied consistently.

Students should have clear guidance on how to make a complaint about marking or any concerns about the teaching and learning process.

Insight 4: Racism remains underreported, and providers must demonstrate to students they are implementing improvements to systems and processes

2% of complaints to the NSO are about racism-related issues. These matters are recorded in NSO complaints through the categories of racial discrimination, racism/racial vilification and inadequate support where the race or culture of a student is a relevant aspect to the complaint. We know that these numbers do not reflect the prevalence of racism issues students experience. The Respect@Uni report from the Australian Human Rights Commission (February 2026) showed that only around 6% of those who experienced direct racism at university made a complaint. We acknowledge that even few students escalate their complaint to the NSO if they are unhappy with their provider's action.

We hear from students who made a complaint to their provider first and escalated to the NSO as they were dissatisfied with their provider's response. In more than half of the complaints, students reported that their complaint to their provider didn't result in any meaningful action.

Racism issues experienced by students included racist comments or behaviour from another student, racist comments or behaviour from an academic staff member, course content that excluded racially marginalised communities and administrative decisions that were discriminatory.

For some of these complaints, after the NSO sought information from the higher education provider, we learned that the higher education provider had taken significant action but failed to inform students who complained about how it had acted based on their feedback.

The NSO notes that a common feature in many racism complaints is that a provider does not use individual complaints to consider where systemic improvements to its practices, policies or training is appropriate. Providers should apply a trauma-informed lens and take complaints seriously to achieve meaningful individual outcomes as well as identify systemic issues. They should use discretion to provide a fair outcome and be prepared to consider if a policy or procedure might be wrong.

Providers should support students to make anonymous complaints and design complaint processes to protect students from reprisal actions. Extending anti-racism training to academic staff as well as administrative staff will help students to get the support they need and ensure they are directed to complaint pathways.

Case study

Communicate investigation actions – racism

Jordan, a First Nations student, was in a second-year tutorial when culturally and racially inappropriate comments were made by the class tutor. The tutor singled out First Nations students, telling them they would be marked unfairly and openly mocked the students' Indigenous perspective on a particular topic.

Jordan made a formal complaint about this experience. The only response she received from the provider was a brief explanation that the complaint was closed because the staff member had been counselled. The provider advised Jordan they didn't think the issue would happen again.

Jordan felt the response was dismissive and lacked any real action. Jordan contacted the NSO for assistance.

The NSO contacted the provider and requested more information about the complaint and the actions they had taken in response. The provider shared with the NSO further information about their investigation of Jordan's complaint, including that the staff member had been dismissed.

The NSO asked the provider to share these details with the student to show they had taken the matter seriously and undertaken an investigation which resulted in significant action. Jordan acknowledged this was a good outcome but was disappointed with how her provider had communicated.

Key learnings

While the case study demonstrates a significant action from the provider as a result of the student complaint, the lack of communication left the student with a lack of trust. This case study highlights the value of transparency and communication of outcomes, which in turn builds trust and will encourage other students to share their experiences.

Insight 5: Barriers exist for students with disability and providers must do more to create learning environments grounded in inclusivity and accessibility

15% of students who contacted the NSO this year identified as a person with a disability or identified having an accessibility requirement, an increase of 3% compared to last year. These students contacted us for a variety of reasons, and 2% of all complaints made to the NSO related to a specific issue a student had with their higher education provider relating to their disability. Most of these complaints related to disability discrimination or inadequate support relating to their disability.

Students living with disability report lower levels of satisfaction and poorer experiences with their tertiary providers, and they are the fastest growing student cohort. Stage 1 of the Insights Reports on Disability in Higher Education was released by the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) in April. Stage 1 raised several opportunities for innovation and improvement, many of which are similar to findings from complaints raised with the NSO. Much more can be done to improve university complaints systems and build trust and confidence.

The most common issue students with a disability raise with the NSO is learning access plans. We received 58 complaints about learning access plans this year, more than twice as many complaints about learning access plans as last year. Complaints about learning access plans included issues relating to inappropriate or discriminatory communication with students (such as about the 'legitimacy' of their disability), poor administrative oversight of learning access plans, delayed implementation problems and inconsistent applications of agreed learning access plan supports.

Higher education providers need to ensure that academic staff, not just dedicated support staff, are equipped to support students with disability and implement learning access plans quickly so that students have the best opportunity for success in their studies. Systems should be in place to ensure that students do not have to start from scratch at the commencement of every unit or semester to have adjustments made, or to convince anyone that their experience and needs are legitimate.

Other complaints included themes of:

- **Default recommendation to delay or withdraw.** When barriers or challenges arise, the default resolution is often to recommend a student delay their studies or withdraw, setting back their progression and completion date, which has employment and financial impacts. The unaddressed underlying problem may resurface for the individual student, or others, and potentially be misrepresented as an academic challenge.
- **Onerous and excessive documentation.** Some students are asked for more evidence than is reasonably needed to establish any functional impacts, reflecting a medicalised and adversarial approach to disability.
- **Inconsistent staff practice.** Students with disability report inconsistent experiences in how their needs are being recognised and supported, varying between courses, faculties and into placements. This highlights a gap between administrative and academic functions and external functions.
- **Delayed and refused support.** Approved supports are not always applied in practice, due to a range of operational delays in implementing supports, procedural delays and a reluctance from academic staff for concerns about 'unfair advantage.'
- **Lack of trauma-informed practice.** A lack of trauma-informed practice can impact students' wellbeing, and repeated self-advocacy can carry a significant emotional cost. This can be compounded by the power imbalance, where students may be reluctant to seek support about their experience if they perceive this may impact their teaching and learning.
- **Indirect discrimination.** Providers have a legal obligation to take reasonable steps to accommodate students with a disability. These barriers are often compounded for students with intersectional identities, who can face disproportionately challenging impacts.

The NSO has helped students to receive a range of outcomes, including having their experience acknowledged and receiving an apology, learning access plans implemented, improved policies and practices, additional training for staff, correction of academic records and credits issued.

In the coming year, the NSO will publish an Insights Report to provide the sector with detailed guidance about the types of issues encountered by students with disability and suggestions to improve provider practice. We encourage providers to create learning environments grounded in principles of inclusivity, accessibility and flexibility.

Case study

Accessibility in all processes – inadequate disability support

Ethan*, is a neurodivergent student undertaking a bachelor's degree. However, he was unable to complete his degree due to health issues.

A few years later, Ethan returned to study now supported by an Equitable Learning Plan (ELP). As written communication was challenging, his ELP stated he required oral communication alternatives. Ethan's original degree was no longer offered, so he chose a closely related program and applied for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Ethan found this challenging, as the only option to apply was through a written submission. Despite requesting an oral presentation to be considered alongside the written submission, the application was assessed solely on the written application and only some of Ethan's past credits were recognised.

Ethan decided to appeal this decision but was unsuccessful again. The Academic Appeals Committee explained the difference between the original degree and new program, granted some credit points and offered a meeting to discuss his amended study plan. The university acknowledged that only allowing written submissions for RPL did not provide accommodations for students with disabilities or additional needs but, at that time, did not make any changes to this approach.

Feeling unsupported and significantly distressed by this outcome, Ethan appealed the decision with the University Appeals Committee on the grounds of disability discrimination, noting the Academic Appeals Committee's acknowledgement of the process' lack of inclusivity. Again, Ethan's appeal was rejected by the University Appeals Committee. They explained that ELPs are for adjustments in teaching and assessments and do not apply to administrative processes.

Ethan made a complaint to the NSO, wanting to be given the opportunity to deliver his application verbally and to ensure the university understood the challenges he had experienced being denied accommodations. The NSO contacted the university seeking further information, including whether a new RPL application could be delivered orally and in-person, and whether they would make changes to their administrative processes to improve accessibility. The NSO also asked whether the provider would consider engaging in a mediated discussion with Ethan.

The university agreed to allow Ethan to resubmit supplementary RPL information in an inclusive oral format. As a result, Ethan received maximum eligible prior credits. The university declined mediation but committed to reviewing their procedure for accessibility. The NSO closed the complaint, considering the response reasonable.

Key learnings

Accessibility in administrative services is just as important as adjustments within the learning environment. Disability discrimination law and the requirement to make reasonable adjustments applies equally to both academic and administrative services provided to students.

Asking for reasonable adjustments is not asking for something unreasonable. The barriers to accessing learning could be the same barriers in accessing administrative processes. Providers need to be more flexible when it comes to individuals requiring additional support, rather than thinking one size fits all.

Case study

Implement reasonable adjustments – learning access

Mai* is a student with hearing impairment who has experienced ongoing issues in receiving reasonable adjustments to assist with her studies. To be able to engage in her studies, Mai's learning access plan included instructions that she required specific equipment to support live captioning of her lectures. Despite her higher education provider being aware of the requirements, it took several weeks for them to implement any form of assistance for Mai. Additionally, the provider also declined to purchase the necessary equipment, opting instead for another software that provided inaccurate closed captioning.

As nearly half the study period was over before the provider took any action, Mai felt that she had no choice but to withdraw from the course to minimise the impact on her academic standing. However, by this time the census date had passed. The provider allowed Mai to withdraw without academic penalty, but she was still required to pay the course fees.

Mai complained to her provider about the delay in getting adjustments in line with her learning access plan and the adequacy of what was provided. Staff advised Mai that if she wanted to have the fees for her course reconsidered, she would need to provide a medical reason for the withdrawal, as having received inadequate support was not sufficient. Mai felt disheartened and decided not to appeal.

After Mai returned to her studies, she approached the NSO, as she found herself in the same position of requiring reasonable adjustments and still not receiving support from the provider. The NSO contacted the provider to better understand what had happened in Mai's specific circumstances and what could be implemented going forward.

In their response, the provider acknowledged that they had not adequately accommodated Mai's needs in the past and offered to arrange a meeting to discuss the issues Mai had faced. They also offered to arrange for Mai to have a note taker for the course she had re-enrolled in. Upon reviewing Mai's complaint, the provider also amended her withdrawal to be without financial penalty.

The provider accepted that their procedures around reasonable adjustments and alternative assessment arrangements were inadequate when considering the needs of students like Mai. They committed to a student-centric approach and provided opportunities to improve staff training regarding inclusion and accessibility.

Key learnings

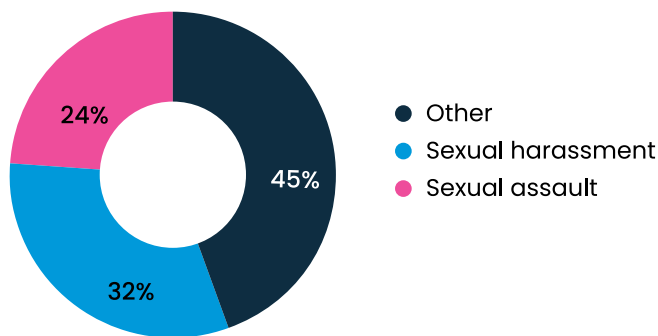
As one in 8 students in higher education have a disability, knowing how to make education accessible for all is of the highest importance. Like Mai, many students have learning accessibility plans but often report to the NSO that they are not being implemented, leaving them disadvantaged in their studies. Providers can improve accessibility by proactively reviewing policies and procedures designed to support inclusion, listening to students with lived experience of disability, and by ensuring learning access plans are implemented in both learning and administrative environments.

Insight 6: Make gender-based violence complaints handling less adversarial for students

Complaints about gender-based violence fall within the category of ‘health and safety’ and, similarly to racism-related complaints, are likely underreported due to known barriers to students complaining. This means that it is likely that one complaint could represent the experience of many students, so providers need to make sure they are taking every complaint seriously and considering what systemic improvements should be made, for example, to their policies, processes or training packages. Some students described the current approach to dispute resolution as adversarial.

There is an opportunity for providers to re-orient their processes around student safety and wellbeing, rather than institutional risk management. Further, strengthening anonymous reporting options alongside formal complaints pathways may help reduce these barriers and support prevention efforts.

Figure 6: Breakdown of complaints related to Gender-based violence



****Gender-based violence – Other:** Other forms of GBV include physical violence, psychological or emotional abuse, economic or financial abuse, coercive control, an act directed against a person based on their gender, or an act that affects a particular gender disproportionately.

78 complaints involving gender-based violence were received in the 2025–26 financial year, highlighting the continuing importance of this issue for students and education providers.

In 37 complaints (47%), gender-based violence occurred as part of the student's study experience. This included 17 (22%) complaints that involved teaching or administrative staff as the reported perpetrator, including 2 cases which involved staff associated with the student's professional placement. A stronger focus on educating staff on appropriate conduct across the institution is needed, along with swift and proportionate responses that protect student safety. Staff who are handling disclosures and complaints that involve other staff need to consider power imbalance, inter-departmental confidentiality, the impact on students' learning and teaching, and appropriate safety risk assessments at the point of students reporting. The implementation of the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence in January 2026 creates a mandate for clear conflict-of-interest management, limits non-disclosure agreements, and staff declarations.

41 complaints (53%) related to incidents of gender-based violence outside the study environment. No matter the context for gender-based violence, higher education providers must consider the support for students to continue to engage safely in their study experience. Experiences of gender-based violence can affect students not only at the time of an incident, but also their capacity to participate in and continue their studies. For some students, the consequences extended into other aspects of their lives and shaped their broader experience of education.

A common theme across the complaints was the inadequate response of education providers. Students described situations where providers had not fully considered their individual circumstances or how their experiences were affecting their study journey. This suggests that the quality and appropriateness of an institution's response is critical to demonstrating a trauma-informed response to the student's situation. A common issue raised by students to the NSO was about how providers considered special consideration withdrawals after the census date. Student victim-survivors may struggle with this process, and providers could be more proactive in their support.

There is a consistent picture for the sector to reflect upon: gender-based violence can have a significant and enduring impact on students' education; effective, individualised responses from providers are critical. Embedding trauma-informed fundamentals more consistently across provider support services and academic processes for student victim-survivors may help address the factors identified as compounding trauma for the remainder of their studies. This includes a central point of contact with sufficient resources to support students, so they don't have to disclose multiple times. Information sharing between teams, as well as accommodation providers, should be timely and safe.

The complaints received also reinforce the importance of considering gender-based violence in the context of the whole student experience – including enrolment, participation, disciplinary processes and professional placements – and ensuring that students are treated fairly, supported appropriately and able to continue their education wherever possible.

Students who have invested their time, and trust, in coming to the NSO have received outcomes including acknowledgement and apology from their provider, new and improved safety plans to assist with their ongoing study, assistance with accommodation relocation and policy improvements.

With the implementation of the National Code in Higher Education to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, recommendations from NSO investigations that relate to gender-based violence are enforceable by the Department of Education's Gender-based Violence Regulator.

Case study

Impact of gender-based violence – workplace integrated learning

Ellen* is an undergraduate student completing her Bachelor of Social Work, a course that requires students to complete a mandatory 1,000 hours of supervised placement. During her second year, Ellen's placement was disrupted by legal proceedings relating to her sexual assault and the ongoing impacts of trauma.

Despite completing most of the 250-hour placement, Ellen was told that she would need to complete a new placement and re-do the full 250 hours, rather than complete the remaining hours. Ellen complained to the university, raising concerns that this was placing her at a disadvantage due to circumstances beyond her control.

After complaining to her university and receiving an unsatisfactory outcome, Ellen brought her complaint to the NSO. The NSO reached out to the university to facilitate a resolution and requested a meeting between university representatives, Ellen and a support person, and the NSO. As a result of this collaborative approach, the university agreed to liaise with the placement provider to finalise the assessment result without having to make up the remaining hours. They also organised for Ellen to meet with teaching staff to discuss options for future placements to ensure she was able to meet the assessment requirements.

Key learnings

This complaint shows the need for providers to use discretion when handling sensitive and complex complaints. It is important for providers to remember that the impact of gender-based violence extends well beyond the incident itself. Upskilling staff in trauma-informed complaint handling minimises the harm caused by institutions when it comes to students disclosing incidences of gender-based violence and allows for informed, safe and student-centric responses.

Our complaint handling services

This year, the NSO received 20 new contacts a day on average. Students contacted us by:



67% webform



25% phone



7% email



1% face-to-face

When a student contacts us, there are several ways the NSO can handle the complaint. Our complaint officers will seek to understand the student’s situation and identify the most effective way to reach a resolution for the matters affecting them and their studies.

Our practice is to reduce the need for students to retell the circumstances of their complaint and to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible for the student and provider, to minimise disruptions to studies and enable the relationship between the student and provider to be maintained. We are committed to making fair, reasonable and evidence-based decisions.

This chapter provides a description of the different ways that we handled complaints from students this year and the outcomes we achieved.

Handling complaints

Early resolution service highlights for 2025–26

- 93% of complaints were resolved through early resolution pathways.
- We managed a 12% increase in demand for services.
- 80% of providers surveyed told us they are implementing service improvements following NSO engagement.

Most of the complaints the NSO handles are dealt with informally through early resolution.

Sometimes a student does not know how to access their provider’s complaints process, and the NSO can help them connect with the right team to go through their provider’s complaints or appeals process, if safe for them to do so. The NSO can also contact the provider about the complaint and ask them to contact the student to resolve it. Students are welcome to contact us again if the matter is then not resolved satisfactorily.

Early resolution can involve the NSO taking the following action:

- contacting the provider for more information about the matter to inform the next steps we take
- asking the provider to investigate the matter and report back to us
- making observations and suggestions for how the provider can improve their processes and procedures
- considering the situation and evidence, determining the provider has acted fairly and reasonably and closing the matter, taking no further action.

The most common suggestions for improved complaints handling we made to providers included:

- ensuring their staff have proper training on policies and procedures and use up-to-date information when providing advice to students
- keeping students updated on the status and progress of their complaints or appeals
- improving their outcome letters or other communication channels to ensure students understand the decision and reasoning behind it.

There is always something to learn when taking a second or deeper look at a student complaint. If we ask a provider to reconsider an individual student complaint, it is not always about a rigid application of policy, but also a signal that being fair, reasonable and trauma-informed matters.

Complaints that have been through the NSO's early resolution have resulted in:

- administrative decisions being made more quickly, like degree certification being actioned after the NSO contacted a provider about an unreasonable delay
- improvements to how students find out about their provider's complaints processes, such as better placement of policies on websites
- providers offering counselling and supports to students
- special consideration decisions being reconsidered and changed by providers
- course fees being refunded
- improvements to training and guidance for provider staff
- students receiving apologies from their providers for their experience.



"The NSO complaints officer who called me was very respectful and clear at explaining how the process works...it was pretty well laid out for me"



"From the very first time I approached the NSO right through to today, the service has been exceptional. The dedication, patience, and genuine commitment to reaching a fair resolution have meant more to me than I can adequately express. Although I am naturally disappointed that the outcome was not what I had hoped for, I would like to sincerely thank you for the time, effort, and professionalism you have shown throughout the process. I appreciate your patience in communicating with both the University and myself, and for keeping me informed throughout the various stages of the complaint. I understand that you have carefully considered my concerns and the information provided by all parties. While this chapter has now come to an end, I am grateful for your assistance and support over the past months"



Conciliation and restorative engagement



22 conciliations commenced



1 restorative engagement conference commenced



34 conciliations completed



20 reached mutual agreement



7 did not proceed



7 did not reach agreement



10 carried over into 2026–27 for completion



The NSO's alternative dispute resolution services of conciliation and restorative engagement (RE) provide pathways for students to tell their provider about the impact of their experiences and can empower students to be part of the resolution process. Students can hear the providers' perspective in a safe, structured environment. Conciliation at the NSO supports participants to reach an agreed, reasonable outcome and provides an opportunity to preserve, or restore, the relationship between the student and provider.

Our conciliation and restorative engagement team are all accredited through the Australian Mediator and Dispute Resolution Accreditation Standards (AMDRAS). The AMDRAS serves to guide the training, assessment and accreditation of dispute resolution practitioners.

Conciliation is a confidential process where the conciliator supports a provider and student to speak with each other in a conference and reach a resolution that works for both parties. Conciliators do this by facilitating open and respectful communication, providing expert information and guidance, and suggesting possible solutions that are fair, reasonable and align with legal and policy requirements. Conciliation conference agreements are documented in a formal record signed by all parties and are kept confidential.

"We were very happy with the meeting. I am so glad that we managed to reach a resolution and could be of assistance to the student."



“You’ve done really well, you explained everything really clearly, it was really supportive.”

Whilst the outcomes of individual records of conciliation conferences are kept confidential, the NSO has achieved many meaningful outcomes through conciliation, including:

	financial settlements	refunds of course fees	
	an exit award for a lower qualification	provision of qualification certificate	
	withdrawal of penalty units	commitment to implement learning access plans and accessibility adjustments	
	verbal and written apologies from provider representatives	support for re-application to accrediting body	
	opportunities to re-sit examinations with independent assessor		
	recognition of work integrated learning placement hours undertaken; negotiating location of placement; and changes in placement supervisors		



“It was useful knowing that I wasn’t over-reacting and that the NSO saw the issues were genuine”

The NSO continues to consider RE as a way for individual students to speak to their experiences and receive acknowledgement. One RE conference was started in 2025–26, and none were completed. As an escalated complaint service, most matters come to us when the dispute is ongoing. For a matter to be suitable for RE, the facts of the matter cannot be in dispute.

Complaint investigations



42 investigations commenced



22 investigations closed



15 recommendations made



14 recommendations accepted

The NSO investigates matters for several reasons. A common reason is because we believe the provider's actions to be unlawful, unreasonable or unfair, or the complaint highlights issues seriously affecting one student or a group of students. Most of the matters progressed to an investigation this year reflect a complaint that should have been considered more carefully by the provider in the first instance. A complaint investigation involves carefully reviewing issues raised and the evidence gathered from the student and higher education provider. Investigations can take up to 12 months to complete.

This year, we commenced 42 investigations. Topics ranged from fees to special circumstances, handling reports of gender-based violence and oversight of third-party services.

We finalised 22 investigations. At the end of each investigation, the NSO explains the decision reached to both the provider and the student.

Four investigations resulted in formal reports. One report was shared publicly. Our decision to share reports publicly is based on the safety and confidentiality of the students involved and whether the investigation outcome is broadly applicable to the sector.

In response to our investigations, the sector has been broadly cooperative. We issued **15** recommendations, and **14** were accepted. **Ten** have already been fully implemented and one partially implemented. This demonstrates commitment from providers to improving the student experience.

Some key learnings from the investigations completed in 2025–26:



Providers should make sure misconduct, and exclusion processes are fair and transparent, ensuring they clearly tell students what the proposed decision is and give them a chance to respond



Providers should set clear expectations for students about their conduct, roles and responsibilities while on placement and have clear and effective complaint processes



Providers need to act to continually improve their complaint processes when responding to gender-based violence

At times, investigation information requests have not been responded to appropriately. In one instance, we had to use our compel power to oblige a provider to address previously unanswered aspects of our inquiry questions. We have also experienced failure to respond on time to requests for information or to procedural fairness responses.

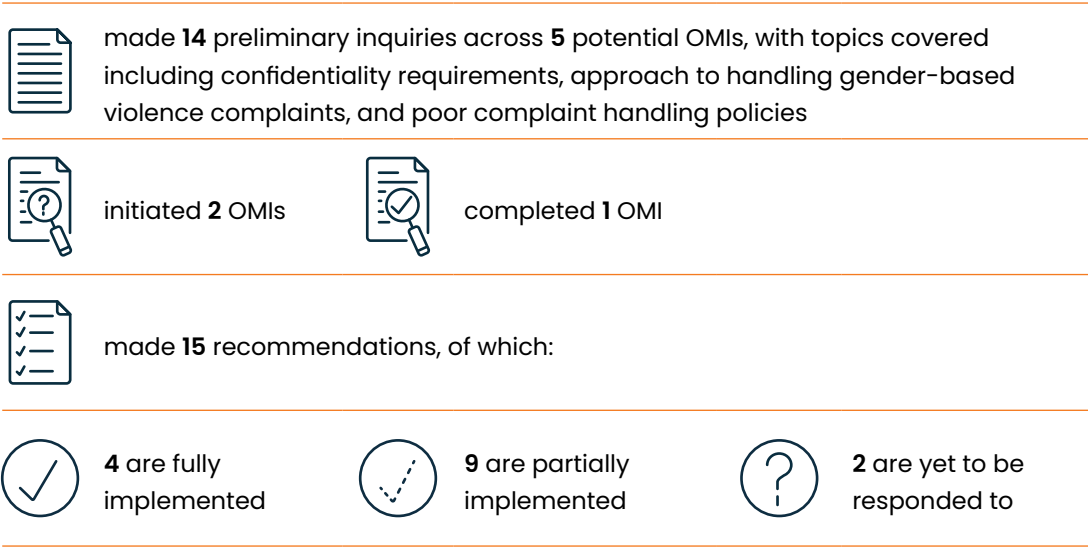
It's in the best interests of students, providers and the NSO for providers to respond to our requests in a timely and open manner. Even more critical is that providers reflect and take ownership when things haven't gone well and commit to a plan to address it.

"I also want to sincerely thank you for the care, professionalism, and sensitivity you showed throughout this process. I know these investigations involve significant work behind the scenes, and I genuinely appreciated the way you engaged with me throughout. It made a very difficult experience feel heard and taken seriously. Thank you again for all your time, effort, and support in bringing this matter to completion."

Own Motion Investigations

An Own Motion Investigation (OMI) is an investigation initiated by the NSO without a formal complaint having to be made. These types of investigations are primarily used to analyse systemic issues affecting many students and aim to address the root causes of poor student experiences across the sector. An OMI may investigate one provider or several, depending on the issue. We prepare reports on the results of our investigations, which may include recommendations, suggestions and comments to higher education providers.

This year, the NSO:



Preliminary inquiries have assisted us to understand whether an issue needs to be progressed to investigation. These inquiries can still lead to improved outcomes for students. For one preliminary inquiry about gender-based violence, and 2 preliminary inquiries about complaint handling policy requirements, the providers engaged in a helpful manner to provide further information to resolve the inquiry without needing to progress to investigation. For the 2 preliminary inquiries about complaint handling policies, both providers updated their policy as a result to improve the fairness of their policy for students.

OMIs allow the NSO to consider issues that place students at a disadvantage, the fairness of higher education provider policies and complaint handling processes, and the consistency and transparency of provider actions across equity groups – for example, international students or students with disability. Our investigation reports aim to correct issues with specific providers and share insights across the sector for systemic improvements.

Can I Talk About This? The use of confidentiality requirements

Why this topic

- Prior to commencing our investigation, we received feedback that confidentiality requirements had been a problem for more than 10 years within the higher education sector.
- We sought to understand whether confidentiality requirements were being applied to protect student wellbeing.
- Feedback from students was that the process of making a complaint or a report to their university can be a stressful or even traumatic experience, especially in serious matters such as gender-based violence.
- Our open-source review identified 21 universities who use a confidentiality clause – just under half of the 44 universities in Australia. This means that approximately 770,000 students are subject to confidentiality requirements if they make a complaint.

Intelligence received

- The NSO found that the use of confidentiality clauses by universities could be restricting students from seeking support and discouraging them from making a complaint.
- We reviewed 30 policies and procedure documents to determine how universities use confidentiality clauses in their complaint handling procedures.
- Our investigation found that confidentiality requirements were improperly applied by the 3 universities we investigated, with each university's application of confidentiality impacting one or more of the principles of trauma-informed practice, putting student wellbeing and recovery at risk.

Sector engagement

- We conducted preliminary inquiries into 10 universities.
- We investigated 3 universities. James Cook University and the University of Newcastle were included on the basis of their response to the preliminary inquiries, and University of Technology Sydney based on NSO complaint information.
- The NSO requested advice from student groups, student associations and student guilds about how confidentiality clauses were applied in practice.
- Eleven student stakeholder groups provided their feedback. Some of the key messages:
 - Confidentiality clauses can be very disempowering for students.
 - Students can end up regretting making a complaint.

Can I Talk About This? The use of confidentiality requirements

Sector engagement (continued)

- Students should be able to speak about their experience after an investigation concludes.
- Confidentiality clauses can feel punitive and silencing. Universities focus on what students cannot do rather than on students' rights.
- Definitions are unclear, and students often don't know what they are allowed to talk about and with whom.
- International students feel susceptible to adverse actions if they speak up, and often don't understand what applies to them and who they can seek support from.



"The university says it has zero tolerance of gender-based violence, but when you actually go through the process of reporting, it is not a zero tolerance response. Everyone who reports says they ended up regretting it, they felt blamed and punished by the university"

Procedural fairness

- Procedural fairness is where we provide parties who are expressly or impliedly criticised in our draft report with the opportunity to make submissions about any errors they perceive in the draft report.
- The 3 universities we investigated were provided with the opportunity to respond to and address errors of fact in the draft report.
- Their cover letters are included in the report as appendices.

Making change

- We made 15 recommendations to the 3 universities we investigated, of which 14 were accepted.
- We have received updates from the 3 universities, and they have shown good progress in implementing the recommendations.

The broader impact

- The recommendations in the report provide lessons for all higher education providers who apply confidentiality requirements to student complaints.
- In addition to the report, the NSO published a factsheet and conducted a webinar for providers, with over 500 attendees from across the sector.

Engagement and education

Given the NSO is still such a new service, our focus this year was on raising awareness of our services and building relationships with students and providers, as well as delivering education on better practice complaints handling. This chapter describes the different ways that we engaged across the sector and the education opportunities we provided.

Raising awareness and building relationships

This year, the NSO has strengthened partnerships, deepened its impact and improved engagement with student communities.



250+ engagements throughout the 25–26 financial year

This included **79** engagements with individual higher education providers, **58** engagements with HEP industry and student peak bodies, networks and associations, 16 engagements with support services.



- **Semester 2 2025** – 12 orientation week events
- **Semester 1 2026** – 20 orientation week events

NSO representatives participated in podcasts, joined livestream expos, gave keynote addresses, joined professional network meetings and spoke at sector forums to increase awareness, collaborate and share sector-wide insights.

We have met with:

- higher education providers: councils and governance, leadership teams, complaints teams, first responder networks, safer communities teams
- student advocates: student unions, guilds and peak student associations bodies
- residential providers and student leaders
- gender-based violence advocacy and support service organisations

- islamophobia, antisemitism and anti-racism advocacy groups and agencies, including the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia and the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism
- international student associations and advocacy networks
- disability advocacy networks
- state-based study networks and city councils
- other agencies, such as the DoE, GBV Regulator, TEQSA, state Ombudsman services, the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia.

We have worked closely with the GBV Regulator on targeted awareness-raising of the NSO and the National Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence. This included co-attendance at on-campus events. We have provided referral information for GBV support services to ensure students with unresolved complaints can engage with the NSO, and we have built relationships with Safer Community Teams as a pathway for students to understand the NSO service.

As part of our commitment to accessibility and engaging with students and stakeholders across the country, NSO staff participated in 6 student-facing events and held 5 meetings with stakeholders in a visit to Tasmania in September 2025. The visit allowed the NSO to build trust and transparency with the University of Tasmania Student Association, accommodation providers, Safer Community Team, Ombudsman Tasmania and University of Tasmania students.

NSO complaint handlers received complaints in person and had informal discussions with students and student advocates about their complaints and complaint handling in general. Students shared their experiences and challenges with us and improved their understanding of the NSO service.

These engagements deepened our insights into the experiences of students in a regional setting, with their own uniqueness but also commonalities with national experiences. We will continue to work in partnership with higher education stakeholders to ensure all students know, trust and can access NSO services.

Student Collective

This year, the NSO established the Student Collective. The Collective provides the NSO with a direct way to hear student insights and experiences, beyond individual complaints, to support our commitment to put student experience at the centre of our work. The 45 appointed student members contribute their insights through workshops, meetings and written submissions, drawing on their lived experience and perspectives.

The Collective represents a wide range of students across undergraduate, postgraduate and research, on campus, hybrid and online study modes, metropolitan and regional students, and a range of higher education providers, with a focus on those from cohorts that may experience greater rates of harm, face a higher risk of negative impacts, or are less often heard, such as:

- students with a disability
- students with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- international students
- students who have been impacted by and/or are victim-survivors of gender-based violence (and those with insights on prevention and response strategies)
- First Nations students
- gender diverse or sexually diverse students.

Within the Collective, intersecting experiences reflect the reality of students across the higher education sector.

Collective members joined a virtual 'meet and greet' in May, with consultations planned throughout 2026–27.

Educating on better practice complaint handling

Our belief is that effective complaint handling is about more than the outcome – it is also about how people are treated along the way, and how providers learn from and maximise the opportunity for systems-level improvements from an individual complaint.

Our education activities this year focused on building skills in clear communication and delivering trauma-informed services for improved student experience and increased trust in complaints handling processes.

Our education supports providers to build fair, accessible and trauma-informed complaint handling systems, increases awareness of emerging issues affecting students and fosters collaboration across the sector. The NSO consults with providers to deliver evidence-based advice that is responsive to the sector's needs, which informs development of practical resources and case studies. We facilitate training to the sector through webinars, presentations and engagement in various forums.

Education Advisory Group

This year, we were pleased to establish our Education Advisory Group (EAG) as a means of gathering information and insights to support capability uplift in complaint handling across the higher education sector. Recruitment was through an expression of interest. We received a high volume of interest from high-quality applicants, with our final EAG comprising 23 members with responsibilities related to complaints handling services within their provider role. The group brings together experienced complaint handling professionals from across the sector. Insights shared by the group contribute to the ongoing development of the NSO's education plan.

The inaugural meeting of the EAG was held in April 2026. Members discussed emerging trends and challenges in student complaint handling and provided valuable insights into areas where complaint handlers are likely to gain benefit from capability uplift. The group considered their priorities for NSO education activities, including opportunities to deliver training on de-escalation techniques for challenging complainant behaviours, and some broader techniques for effective communication. A webinar on this topic was delivered in June.

The establishment of the group reflects the NSO's commitment to an informed approach to delivering continuous improvement in the sector and building meaningful partnerships within the sector.

NSO webinars

This year, the NSO delivered 3 educational webinars for the higher education sector, designed to increase access to practical guidance and enhance capability in better practice complaint handling.

Strong demand for these sessions was demonstrated through both attendance and on-demand views of the recordings available on the NSO website. The NSO reached over 2,000 sector stakeholders across its first 3 webinars, and feedback from attendees has been consistently positive, with 94.6% of attendees rating the webinars good to excellent.



"The two NSO webinars I have attended so far has been some of the best professional education I have experienced. They do not have a lot of useless fluff but instead cut straight to the topic and give practical advice and strategies. Well done."

There is a clear desire from sector staff working in complaints for ongoing education to help support better practice complaint handling, and better development of resources and sharing of insights from complaint trends to improve overall student experience. We will focus on working together with the sector, delivering training and advice to improve complaint handling for vulnerable student cohorts and addressing systemic issues.

The webinar program focused on the key areas identified in our education plan and were informed by our sector engagement and the EAG:

- trauma-informed complaint handling
- the use of confidentiality requirements in complaint handling
- de-escalation skills in student complaint handling.

Trauma-informed complaint handling – Webinar

582 attendees.

Hosted by Sarah Bendall, the webinar was grounded in the expertise of Kim Copeland. Kim presented the foundational principles of trauma-informed complaints handling, explaining the physiological and neurobiological impacts of stress and trauma. The training outlined how safety, trust and agency underpin effective, fair and person-centred complaints processes. Kim detailed practical trauma-informed techniques for each stage of the complaints process and provided actionable strategies for improving student experience and outcomes. The feedback reflected high satisfaction and a strong appetite for further learning on this topic.

The use of confidentiality requirements in complaint handling – Webinar

526 attendees.

Sarah Bendall and the team unpacked the NSO's recommendations for higher education providers from the NSO's first Own Motion Investigation – ["Can I talk about this?" The use of confidentiality requirements in university complaint handling](#). Michele Clark, Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Gender-based Violence Regulator, provided clarity on how the National Code requirements intersect with confidentiality practices, explaining the Regulator's focus on outcomes, prohibition of non-disclosure agreements unless requested, and regulatory expectations for transparency, support access, staff training and continuous improvement.

Eighty-eight per cent of the feedback received rated the webinar as good to excellent, 75% indicated that the information shared in the webinar helped them to better understand the recommendations in the Own Motion Investigation report and 63% indicated they would likely now make changes to their confidentiality requirements in complaint handling policies.

De-escalation skills in student complaint handling – Webinar

488 attendees.

Following the EAG's advice that this was a gap in capability for the sector, this webinar focused on de-escalation skills and strategies to navigate situations while handling complaints where students feel frustrated, distressed or unheard as part of the process leading to escalating behaviour. The webinar was hosted by Sarah Bendall, with expert Shiv Martin, who explained the drivers and dynamics of student complainant behaviour, explored how to spot early signs of student distress and provided practical de-escalation micro skills. The webinar provided practical skills on creating healthy boundaries, protection of procedural fairness and restoring trust between the student and provider. April Vocale, a member of the EAG, joined the conversation to work through practical tools and strategies that can be applied to improve student experience.

Attendees rated the webinar as either excellent or good. Almost all attendees indicated the training was relevant to a higher education complaint handling context and agreed that the webinar provided practical skills they could apply in their role.

Improvements to sector complaint handling

This year, we asked higher education providers to share improvements they've made to complaint handling practices. Seventy-two per cent reported that they had identified opportunities for improvement following engagement with the NSO. Almost 3 quarters of the providers reported that they had either implemented or were in the process of implementing changes to complaint handling processes or policies, while 70% reported improvements to staff capability and education in complaint handling or other areas of student services.

Implementation of NSO recommendations or suggestions made to the broader sector also featured in what providers told us, with approximately 60% of providers reporting they had implemented or were in the process of implementing changes. This demonstrates the impact of our investigation reports and statements across the sector, not just for parties to investigations.

Examples of changes providers told us they had made are:



increasing the awareness, visibility and accessibility of the complaints process across their university



implementing improvements in the coordination and delivery of reasonable adjustments and support services



using QR codes in learning spaces and classrooms for quick access, and improving visibility of their Feedback Portal on their College website



refreshing email correspondence templates to improved clarity for students



co-designing updates to the student misconduct procedures with students and representatives of the Student Guild.

These improvements can have a significant impact on the student experience and ultimately create efficiency, clarity and trust with students.

Complaints recorded by individual higher education provider 2025–26

Every student complaint is useful, as each complaint builds a national picture of what is happening in the sector.

Student complaints help providers see their gaps and provide an opportunity to make systemic improvements before issues escalate.

The figures in this table are only one part of the broader picture. Large numbers of complaints don't necessarily point to poor service from a provider but could mean a positive complaints handling culture and students who trust that, if they complain, action will be taken.

TEQSA's *Statement of Regulatory Expectations: Student grievance and complaint mechanisms* states that providers must give students information on how to access the National Student Ombudsman (NSO) and other available external avenues of complaint resolution. We commend the providers who provide easy-to-access information about the NSO to their students.

Providers will not hear from the NSO for every complaint included in the table below. In many instances, this is because we have requested the student first approach their provider formally with their concerns (where they have not previously done so). There may be other complaints listed in this table where the provider is not aware, as we have requested further information from the student that has not yet been provided, or the matter has not yet been considered by an NSO complaint officer. In other instances, we may close matters without referring to a provider, as we view the provider's actions as fair and reasonable, or it is unlikely a more suitable resolution can be reached with our intervention.

A complaint closed in 2025–26 may have been received in the previous financial year.

The number of complaints received per higher education provider is included in our annual report as a requirement under s 21AX of the Ombudsman Act.

Table 2: Complaints recorded by individual higher education provider 2025–26

Provider name	Complaints received	Complaints received per 1,000 students	Complaints closed
Academies Australasia Institute	3	n/a	1
Academy of Interactive Technology Pty Ltd	2	2.68	0
ACAP University College (Navitas)	38	6.56	34
Acknowledge Education Pty Ltd	34	n/a	20
Adelaide Institute of Higher Education Pty Ltd	3	n/a	3
Adelaide University	75	2.36	62
AIBI Higher Education	2	3.37	1
AIE Institute Limited	3	11.76	2
AIH Higher Education	4	n/a	2
AIM Business School	3	1.93	3
AISI (Kontea)	1	n/a	1
Alphacrucis University College Ltd	4	1.40	1
Analytics Institute of Australia Pty Ltd	2	n/a	3
APEX Australia Higher Education	5	n/a	5
Australasian Academy of Higher Education	1	n/a	1
Australasian College of Health and Wellness	2	1.97	3
Australian Catholic University	55	1.57	39
Australian College of Natural Medicine Pty Ltd	6	1.78	6
Australian College of Nursing	2	1.65	0
Australian College of Physical Education	2	n/a	1
Australian College of the Arts Pty Ltd (Collarts)	5	2.74	3
Australian Data and Cyber Institute	1	n/a	0
Australian Film, Television and Radio School	3	7.41	1
Australian Institute of Business	5	1.58	1
Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors (AIPC)	14	8.78	11
Australian National University	107	4.50	63
Australian School of Accounting	4	n/a	1
Australian University College of Divinity	4	2.28	1

Provider name	Complaints received	Complaints received per 1,000 students	Complaints closed
Australian University of Theology Limited	1	0.41	1
Avondale University	3	2.81	3
Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School	1	n/a	0
Bond University Limited	26	4.38	22
Box Hill Institute	4	8.95	4
Campion College Australia	1	4.63	0
Canberra Institute of Technology	1	n/a	1
Canterbury Institute of Management	4	1.49	2
Canterbury Language Academy	1	n/a	1
Centre for Pavement Engineering Education	1	n/a	1
CG Spectrum Institute Pty Ltd	2	16.39	1
Charles Darwin University	22	1.74	19
Charles Sturt University	90	2.57	76
Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand	3	0.22	2
Chisholm Institute	2	6.99	0
Christian Heritage College	1	1.28	2
Churchill Institute of Higher Education	1	n/a	0
CQUniversity	43	1.95	37
Crown Institute of Higher Education	19	6.98	13
Curtin College	12	4.41	10
Curtin University	103	1.81	85
Danford Higher Education	3	n/a	0
Deakin College	13	5.23	9
Deakin University	122	2.06	95
ECA College of Health Sciences	3	7.63	0
Edith Cowan College	5	1.76	4
Edith Cowan University	82	2.66	51
Edvantage Institute Australia Pty Ltd	2	n/a	1

Provider name	Complaints received	Complaints received per 1,000 students	Complaints closed
Elite Education Institute	1	n/a	0
Engineering Institute of Technology Pty Ltd	5	3.22	3
Excelsia University College	12	n/a	9
Eynesbury College	15	61.48	7
Federation University Australia	49	3.93	34
Flinders University	32	1.29	27
Gateway Business College	1	n/a	0
Global Higher Education	1	n/a	1
Griffith College	5	3.24	2
Griffith University	88	1.98	63
Hawthorn Melbourne	3	n/a	2
Holmes Institute	40	6.45	29
Holmesglen Institute	4	4.98	7
IHM Australia	3	n/a	2
Ikon Institute of Australia	25	8.08	25
Imperial Engineering Education	1	n/a	1
International College of Hotel Management trading as ICHM	1	4.07	0
International College of Management, Sydney	4	2.16	4
International Institute of Business and Technology Australia	1	n/a	0
ISN Psychology Pty Ltd	15	29.70	15
James Cook University	20	1.01	17
Jazz Music Institute	2	29.85	2
JMC Academy	7	2.57	4
Kaplan Business School Pty Limited	18	1.86	19
Kaplan Higher Education	12	3.95	9
Kent Institute Australia	1	1.18	2
Kingsford International Institute	1	n/a	0
La Trobe College Australia	3	2.42	2

Provider name	Complaints received	Complaints received per 1,000 students	Complaints closed
La Trobe University	95	2.53	84
LCI Melbourne	3	21.28	1
Le Cordon Bleu Australia	1	3.77	0
Leaders institute	2	n/a	2
Lincoln Education Australia	5	n/a	2
Lyons College	1	n/a	0
Macquarie University	83	1.85	80
Melbourne Institute of Higher Education	4	n/a	0
Melbourne Institute of Technology	16	0.17	9
Melbourne Polytechnic	4	n/a	4
Monaro Higher Education	1	n/a	1
Monash College	26	12.09	13
Monash University	74	0.79	63
Morling College	1	5.56	0
Murdoch University	24	0.97	19
National Academy of Professional Studies	7	n/a	1
National Art School	1	1.67	1
National Institute of Dramatic Art, NIDA	1	n/a	1
Nova Anglia College	1	n/a	0
Oceania Polytechnic Institute of Education Pty Ltd	1	n/a	0
Oxford Institute of Higher Education	4	15.50	3
Perth Bible College	1	n/a	1
Photography Studies College	2	14.81	1
Polytechnic Institute Australia	10	7.44	10
Queensland University of Technology	75	1.43	60
Raffles College of Design and Commerce	1	n/a	1
RMIT University	220	2.90	167
SAE University College	10	2.56	11
Skyline Higher Education Australia	1	n/a	1

Provider name	Complaints received	Complaints received per 1,000 students	Complaints closed
South Australian Institute of Business and Technology	9	12.15	5
Southern Academy of Higher Education	1	n/a	0
Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education) Pty Ltd	19	11.98	18
Southern Cross Education Institute Pty Ltd	2	n/a	1
Southern Cross Institute	11	n/a	10
Southern Cross University	44	2.40	44
SP Jain School of Global Management Pty Ltd	2	0.67	1
Stanley College	16	15.12	8
Study Group Australia Pty Limited	1	n/a	0
Swinburne University of Technology	93	2.05	81
Sydney Institute of Business & Technology	3	13.64	1
Sydney Institute of Higher Education	2	n/a	0
Sydney Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine	1	5.68	0
Sydney International School of Technology and Commerce	2	n/a	1
Sydney Met	1	n/a	1
TAFE Queensland	2	5.67	2
Taylors College	22	n/a	22
Technical and Further Education Commission	7	2.48	7
Texila College Australia	5	n/a	4
The Australian Institute of Music	6	n/a	3
The Cairnmillar Institute	4	7.66	3
The College of Law	3	0.43	2
The Institute of International Studies (TIIS)	2	n/a	1
The Metavision Institute	1	n/a	1
The University of Adelaide	40	1.31	47
The University of Melbourne	151	2.00	126
The University of New England	43	2.22	33

Provider name	Complaints received	Complaints received per 1,000 students	Complaints closed
The University of Newcastle	47	1.35	34
The University of Queensland	134	2.35	87
The University of Western Australia	54	1.83	42
Think: Colleges	2	30.77	1
Top Education Institute (IMC)	1	n/a	3
Torrens University Australia	119	4.68	107
Trinity College	12	n/a	4
UBSS – Group Colleges Australia	7	1.93	1
Universal Higher Education	1	n/a	1
University of Canberra	37	2.09	36
University of Notre Dame Australia	50	4.17	41
University of South Australia	37	1.09	33
University of Southern Queensland	33	1.61	24
University of Sydney	183	2.32	153
University of Tasmania	61	1.91	59
University of Technology Sydney trading as UTS	87	1.73	70
University of the Sunshine Coast	21	1.11	15
University of Wollongong	56	1.60	40
UNSW College	18	n/a	6
UNSW Sydney	220	2.67	152
UOW College Australia	3	15.79	1
UTS College	25	5.41	19
Victoria University	91	2.63	74
Victorian Institute of Technology (VIT)	4	0.99	3
Wentworth Institute	5	3.47	2
Western Sydney University	122	2.55	105
Western Sydney University International College	1	n/a	1
Whitecliffe Institute of Creative Arts and Technology	1	3.55	1
Whitehouse Institute of Design Australia	5	14.79	4
William Angliss Institute	1	2.23	1

Abbreviations

Short form	Long form
AAT	Administrative Appeals Tribunal
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMDRAS	Australian Mediator and Dispute Resolution Accreditation Standards
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CoE	Confirmation of Enrolment
C-PTSD	Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
DoE	Department of Education
DoHA	Department of Home Affairs
EAG	Education Advisory Group
ELP	Equitable Learning Plan
ESOS Act	<i>Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000</i>
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GBVR or 'The Regulator'	Gender-based Violence Regulator
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HELP	Higher Education Loan Program
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other sexual orientations/gender identities
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSO	National Student Ombudsman
OMI	Own Motion Investigation
OSECA	Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism
OSECI	Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia
QR Code	Quick Response Code
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
The National Code or 'The Code'	National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence 2025
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

Data caveats

Complaints and enquiries are collectively known as contacts. If a contact is classified as a complaint, it has an issue assigned to it and an outcome recorded against it when it is finalised. A complaint can have more than one issue or outcome. Figures are presented as whole numbers for ease of reading, with rounding performed at the last stage of calculation for maximum accuracy. Values from x.00 to x.49 are rounded down and values from x.50 to x.99 are rounded up. Therefore, in some instances, results may not total 100.

Complaints received per 1,000 students uses publicly available student enrolment data released annually by Department of Education. Enrolment data is not available for all higher education providers.

Data relating to students' personal or study characteristics are voluntarily provided by students. This data is indicative only and should not be interpreted as representative of all students or complaints.

Case studies may represent an individual experience or may draw on information from multiple cases to illustrate common themes and experiences. Pseudonyms have been used in all cases and identifying details may have been modified or omitted to protect privacy and confidentiality.

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