

NSO Statement of Expectations of Higher Education Providers

This Statement:

- sets out what the National Student Ombudsman (the NSO) expects from higher education providers (providers) when we engage with them to carry out our functions
- applies to all providers¹ in the NSO's jurisdiction, including principal executive officers, all employees, appointments and contractors
- replaces any pre-existing arrangements that might exist with other jurisdictions of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

The NSO seeks to:

- provide an independent and impartial service to resolve complaints by higher education students about the actions of their provider
- promote best practice complaint handling for providers
- proactively influence systemic improvement in the administration of the higher education sector.

We aim to do this by:

- independently and impartially handling complaints with a trauma informed lens
- influencing providers to be accountable, lawful, fair, transparent and responsive

¹ The National Student Ombudsman jurisdiction covers higher education providers registered with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

- being committed to continuous improvement.

We expect that providers will:

1. **Work with us in good faith and actively assist** us to perform our functions including requests for information, complaint referrals, investigations, alternative dispute resolution and restorative engagement.

This means providers will:

- actively seek to resolve complaints we are dealing with
- when the NSO requests it, give information, documents and access to staff, premises and systems
- participate in education opportunities which support the functions of the NSO
- give the NSO **correct and complete responses to requests for information** in the specified timeframe:
 - Documents provided will be relevant and in a clear digestible format, including an index if there is a large volume.
 - Where a timeframe cannot be met, providers will contact us as early as possible after receiving a request for information to request additional time and explain why more time is needed.
 - Where a provider does not provide a response within the specified timeframe and does not seek or is not granted more time, its response will be recorded as being provided late.
 - The NSO may proceed to form a view based on the information already available, and publicly refer to instances where a response was not received.
- be **honest, transparent and thorough** when providing assistance, by submitting all information or documents that could reasonably be considered relevant, even if not specifically referred to in the request/requirement.

- If unsure whether information or documents are relevant or useful, or unsure about the NSO's power to request certain information or documents, the provider will promptly contact us to **seek clarification**.
- If asked to do so, providers will **identify and make available staff** who are best suited to answer questions and/or assist us to locate and extract relevant information from records management and customer management systems.

2. Respond to our recommendations and suggestions within the specified timeframe and give updates on implementation as required.

This means providers will:

- provide clear **responses to each suggestion/recommendation** – accept, partially accept or not accept – within the specified timeframe. Providers will also provide information about how each recommendation will be implemented and accurate and achievable timeframes for full implementation of each recommendation. Equivocal responses such as 'noted' will be recorded as not accepted.
- provide **prompt updates on implementation**, including evidence of implementation, in accordance with requests made by the NSO.

3. Proactively advise us about issues affecting the provider that will impact students

in accordance with applicable legislation and policy, or might otherwise result in unfair or unreasonable outcomes. Providers do not need to have all the answers (including a fix) before approaching the NSO and should contact us **as soon as practicable** once they become aware of an issue (because the NSO may be receiving complaints about the issue and can better assist students if we know about it).

4. Act in a timely way to implement and report to the NSO progress against suggestions and recommendations we make.

This means providers will:

- actively implement and monitor implementation of our recommendations and suggestions for improvement

- provide evidence of implementation of our recommendations and suggestions.

5. Give the NSO accurate details for designated points of contact.

- provide an appropriate and regularly monitored contact email, noting positional mailboxes are preferable to an individual staff contact (as staff may change roles, change jobs or go on leave).
- NOTE: In most instances we will use these contact points but we may contact any area/officer within a provider if we consider that area/person is best placed to assist us to perform our functions.