

[REDACTED]

30 January 2025

**Ms Emily Strickland**

Level 8, 95 Grenfell Street  
Adelaide SA 5000  
Karna Country

[REDACTED]

Dear Ms Strickland

**Managing National Student Ombudsman (NSO) – South Australian Ombudsman  
(SA Ombudsman) Relations**

This letter is to establish arrangements to manage relations between our organisations within the higher education sector.

Legislative changes with the passing of the *Universities Accord (National Student Ombudsman) Act 2024* established the NSO as the primary escalated complaints handling mechanism for students within the higher education sector.

I understand that the SA Ombudsman has existing responsibilities within this sector, including receiving complaints from students concerning their higher education provider.

I would like to establish arrangements which will focus on coordination, cooperation and information sharing between our two organisations for the effective oversight of the higher education sector.

I propose that the NSO and the SA Ombudsman agree to:

- facilitate trauma informed referrals between our organisations where appropriate
- ensure all complaint referrals between our organisations are done with the express informed consent of the complainant

- share information, policy and guidance documents, including complaint assessment matrices, to ensure our organisations have the information required to accurately communicate complaints pathways to students
- share de-identified complaint data to enable the NSO to report on the volume of student complaints across Australia, and to consider national complaint trends among the higher education sector
- establish regular formal engagement and maintain contact lists of relevant officers to resolve any jurisdictional or administrative matters between our organisations
- partner together on stakeholder engagement initiatives within the SA Ombudsman's jurisdiction to promote best practice complaints handling within the higher education sector
- manage potential Public Interest Disclosures (PIDs) under the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2018* (SA) and potential misconduct or maladministration complaints by having the NSO refer them to the SA Ombudsman
- Manage complaints in relation to TEQSA-registered dual providers<sup>1</sup>, so that the SA Ombudsman handles complaints about a VET course or VET student, and with consent refers higher education student complaints within the NSO jurisdiction to the NSO
- manage complaints concerning controlled entities of higher education providers on a case-by-case basis, noting that our understanding of these entities shall develop over time.

I propose that if the above is acceptable to the SA Ombudsman, that this letter and your letter of confirmation in reply shall together constitute an Exchange of Letters between our two agencies and that a copy of this Exchange of Letters be published to our respective websites.

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<sup>1</sup> A dual provider is an entity that can confer both higher education awards and Vocational Educational Training qualifications.

I further propose that this Exchange of Letters does not create any enforceable legal rights or obligations between our organisations.

Nonetheless, we agree to act reasonably and cooperate in good faith in accordance with the terms of this Exchange of Letters.

Additionally, if a dispute cannot be resolved at the contact officer level, the dispute will be escalated to the Deputies of each organisation, or to officers nominated by the contact officer for each organisation, for resolution.

This Exchange of Letters shall commence on the date the SA Ombudsman provides the letter of confirmation and will continue until either organisation provides notice to vary or terminate the arrangement.

Yours sincerely



**Sarah Bendall**  
**First Assistant Ombudsman**  
**National Student Ombudsman**