

Student Collective

Terms of Reference

Overview

The National Student Ombudsman (NSO) recognises the need for student voice to guide service improvement and inform resource development. The establishment of the Student Collective (collective) aims to deepen the connection the NSO has with higher education students. The collective is designed to be flexible and responsive; a forum that complements existing consultation mechanisms by ensuring voices not always present in mainstream forums are heard directly and authentically. The NSO recognises that student voice will lead to richer and greater outcomes for the student experience, and capability uplift across the sector.

Guiding Principles

The collective exists to surface lived experience perspectives from students. Its formation is intentional; we value:

- how members can apply their experience to shape future learnings, rather than qualifications or positional requisites
- the lived experiences from diverse identities, including intersecting experiences
- balanced insight from voices who experience harm, experience a higher likelihood of negative impact, and/or are not well-heard
- community consultation that is respectful, inclusive, trauma-informed, and considered
- bringing to the surface current issues impacting the student experience.

Membership and eligibility

Membership is voluntary via expression of interest. To be eligible, members must be currently enrolled as an undergraduate or postgraduate student at a TEQSA-registered higher education provider and above 18 years of age.

The NSO will appoint members for a term of 12 months, subject to maintaining active student enrolment with possibility of extension for up to a further 6 months.

Compensation for participation will be in accordance with the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's [Community Stakeholders Paid Participation Policy](#).

Members must declare any conflicts of interest and maintain confidentiality in respect of resources shared and discussions with NSO staff. Members will not have any involvement in operational matters, such as individual complaints, investigation reports, or NSO frontline services, either collectively or as individuals.

Community Representation

To ensure the group can be consulted as a whole or in smaller sub-groups while maintaining representative coverage, there will be a minimum 20% representation across each of the following:

- people with a disability
- culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- international students
- gender-based violence (including those impacted by gender-based violence and those with insights on prevention and response strategies)
- First Nations
- gender or sexually diverse.

The collective aims to represent a diverse student experience within these groups, including undergraduate, postgraduate, on campus, hybrid and online study modes, metropolitan and regional students, as well as representation from different higher education providers. Representation with other demographic factors not specifically named in this document will also be considered. Members may identify with more than

one community. Members are not required to disclose personal details beyond what is necessary to demonstrate their connection or insights with a community. The NSO is interested in how members would draw on their experience to provide insight, rather than the personal nature of the experience itself. The NSO will review membership as it considers appropriate, including in response to changes in student cohort needs, emerging issues, or the evolving direction of the collective. Individual contributions to tasks will not be attributed or publicly identifiable.

Participation

Participation in tasks referred to the collective is on an opt-in basis. Members may be invited to contribute through workshops, meetings, written responses, or light research tasks. Not all members will be relevant to every opportunity, and the NSO recognises that members are current students with existing commitments. Members may be asked to provide input on:

- NSO resources, or guidance materials relating to the student experience
- issues impacting specific student cohorts or sector wide complaint themes
- the NSO's engagement, communication or education approaches
- other matters where student perspectives would be of value.

When an opportunity arises, members will be provided with clear information including:

- what is being requested
- how the information will be used
- expected time commitment, including any preparation required
- reasonable timeframes to respond.

The NSO may consult the whole group or approach a smaller sub-group of members with relevant experience for more specific matters, on an ad hoc basis. Members will not be required to participate in all opportunities. The overall time commitment is not expected to exceed 15 hours per year, with no minimum engagement.

These terms of reference will be reviewed annually.