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FOR MEDIA

Student ombudsman releases Insights Report on handling racism complaints

Today the National Student Ombudsman (NSO) released an Insights Report to assist higher education providers in improving their handling of racism-related complaints. The Report is made in line with the NSO's legislative role to advise providers on handling complaints.

Based on a review of student complaints, the NSO makes 16 suggestions for how providers can improve their handling of racism-related complaints.

'*While complaints about racism are a small proportion of the total complaints the NSO has received, the impact of racism on students can be significant and we have seen clear opportunities for institutions in the higher education sector to improve,*' said National Student Ombudsman, Iain Anderson.

Student complaints to the NSO have shown that there are opportunities for providers to reduce the barriers to students complaining and to gain student trust in complaints processes.

The NSO suggestions include training for academic staff, adopting trauma-informed approaches, implementing individual and systemic outcomes, removing barriers for complainants, prioritising fairness, developing clear policies for anonymous complaints, establishing boundaries of acceptable course content and speech, making necessary changes in policies and procedures.

'Fair, accessible and effective complaints handling can greatly boost student wellbeing and belonging and maximise the likelihood of completing their studies. Individual complaints handling can also identify areas for systemic, structural and cultural improvement to better prevent racism,' added Mr Anderson.

A tertiary education experience free from racism is a priority under Australia's Universities Accord 2024, the national strategy for boosting student participation and success.

In January 2027 Higher Education Standards Framework amendments will come into force to set clearer expectations on providers to prevent and respond to racism, implement transparent complaints processes and embed safe, respectful, and inclusive behaviours across institutions. As part of these changes, providers will need to consult with students as they review their complaints processes. This Insights Report helps providers to understand how they can better meet student needs in handling racism-related complaints.

'While it can feel daunting to make a complaint, as this report shows, complaints have the power to change things for the better for all students. If students are dissatisfied with the actions taken by their higher education provider, they can contact the NSO on 1300 395 775 or at nso.gov.au,' said Sarah Bendall, First Assistant Ombudsman.

The NSO Insights Report, **Handling racism complaints: Suggestions for better practice complaints handling** is available on the NSO website.

For more information visit nso.gov.au or for media enquiries email media@ombudsman.gov.au