

# **‘Working in the international education space’**

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**Overseas Students Ombudsman**



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# Overseas Students Ombudsman

- We investigate complaints from overseas students about private universities, colleges and schools
- We work with education providers to help them improve their internal complaints and appeals processes
- We report on trends and systemic issues



# Complaint trends

- OSO has dealt with 1,700+ complaints since 9 April 2011
- We investigated nearly 1000 of those complaints (58%)
- We decided not to investigate around 700 because:
  - the student had not yet been through the provider's internal appeals process
  - we were able to make a decision on the documents the student provided, without needing to contact the provider
  - the complaint was about the quality of the course, staff or facilities so we transferred it to the relevant regulator for consideration (ASQA or TESA)
  - the complaint was about a provider closure so we transferred it to the TPS



# Complaint trends

- Main complaint types:
  1. Refund & fee disputes (28%)
  2. Transfer/release letter external appeals (16%)
  3. Unsatisfactory attendance external appeals (11%)
  4. Unsatisfactory course progress external appeals (9%)



# Recent trends and statistics

## Other complaint types:

- grades/assessment
- graduation/completion certificates/academic transcripts
- Providers' internal complaints and appeals process
- cancellation of enrolment and deferrals
- education agents



# How we investigate

- We are independent, impartial and investigate in private
- We usually ask students to go through the provider's internal complaints and appeals process before we investigate
- We ask the provider to explain what they did and why
- We request relevant documents from both parties
- We form a view and provide an opportunity to comment before we make a final decision



# How we investigate

- If we find the provider did things correctly, we explain this to the student
- If we find substantial errors, we make recommendations to the provider, including giving the student a remedy
- We also make suggestions for systemic improvements to providers' policies and practices
- We analyse complaints data to identify systemic issues across the sector and publish issues papers on relevant topics



# Systemic issues

- **Written Agreement Problems** –many providers have written agreements that do not comply with the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (ESOS Act) or National Code requirements
- Errors result in providers having to pay refunds/forego fees
- Many providers lack a cancellation fee policy as it is not (currently) required by the ESOS Act or National Code
- OSO Issues Paper sent to ACPET and other stakeholders in July for comment by 1 September 2014
- OSO written agreements checklist and survey sent to providers with our July provider e-newsletter





# Systemic issues

- **Overseas Students Health Cover (OSHC)** – problems with some private providers taking the money but not arranging the cover for the student
- Some providers start the cover too late – placing the student in breach of their student visa condition
- We worked with Education, Immigration, Health, the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman and the OSHC Insurers to explore OSHC administration issues
- Issues Paper published on 5 August with recommendations for Education, Health and Immigration



# Sector engagement

- We present at key industry conferences such as ACPET, English Australia (EA), Independent Schools Council and the Council for International Students Australia (CISA)
- We deliver webinar training to providers through the ACPET and EA professional development programs
- We meet quarterly with the regulators (ASQA & TEQSA), Department of Education, Department of Immigration and the TPS
- We liaise with other complaint handlers around Australia to identify wider trends and promote consistent complaints handling for overseas students and education providers



# Publications and resources

- We send out a **provider e-newsletter** to all private providers twice a year with useful tips and advice
- We also send out a **student e-newsletter** twice a year
- You can subscribe to our newsletters on our website:

[www.oso.gov.au/publications-and-media/](http://www.oso.gov.au/publications-and-media/)

# Publications and resources

- We publish quarterly complaints statistics reports
- We have produced a guide to 'Better Practice Complaint Handling for Education Providers'



## Better Practice Complaint Handling for Education Providers

February 2011

### Complaint Handlers' Checklist

- ☐ Do you have written complaint handling procedures? Are they easy to understand and apply?
- ☐ Do you acknowledge complaints promptly?

**ACKNOWLEDGE**  
all complaints quickly





# Questions ?