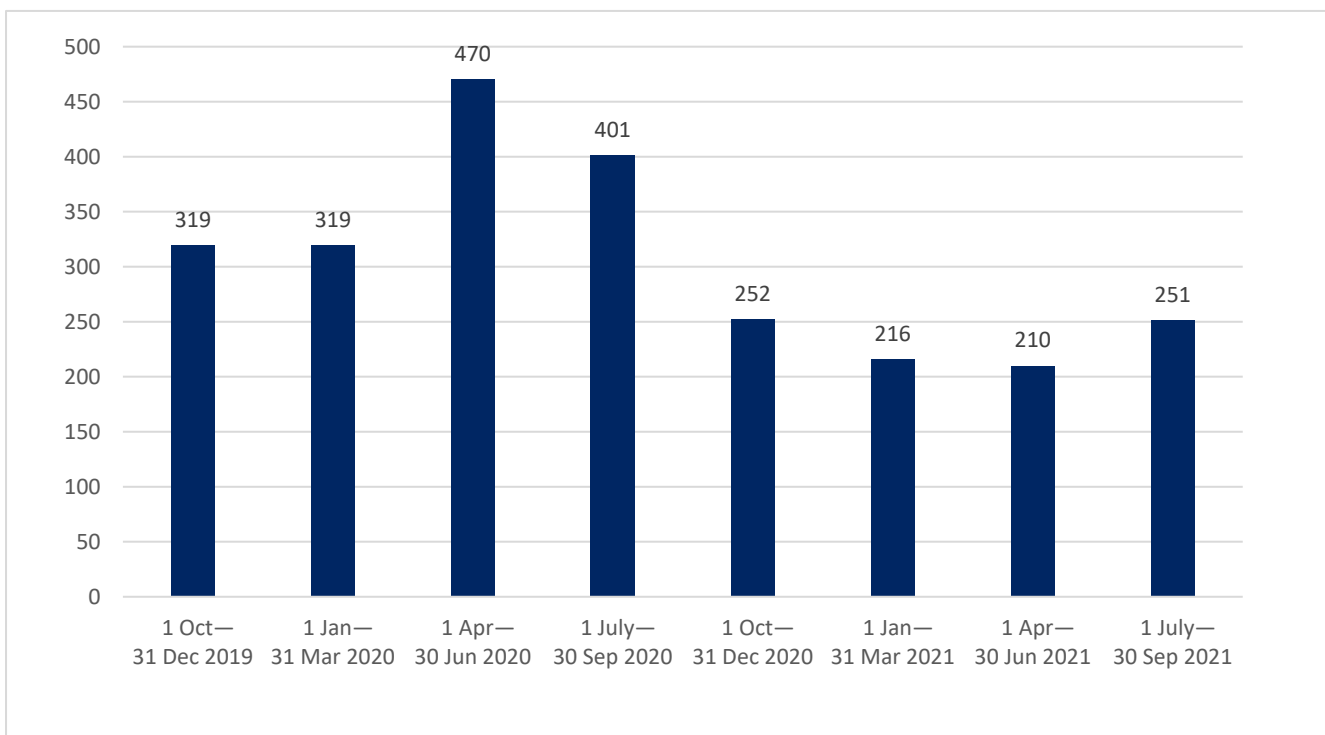


Quarterly Update: 1 July–30 September 2021

Complaints and enquiries received

During the 1 July to 30 September 2021 quarter, the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (the Office) received 251 complaints and enquiries from international students enrolled with private registered education providers (see Figure 1). This represents a 37 per cent decrease in complaints when compared to the same period last year and is consistent with the decreased number of international students in Australia during the period, as a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions.

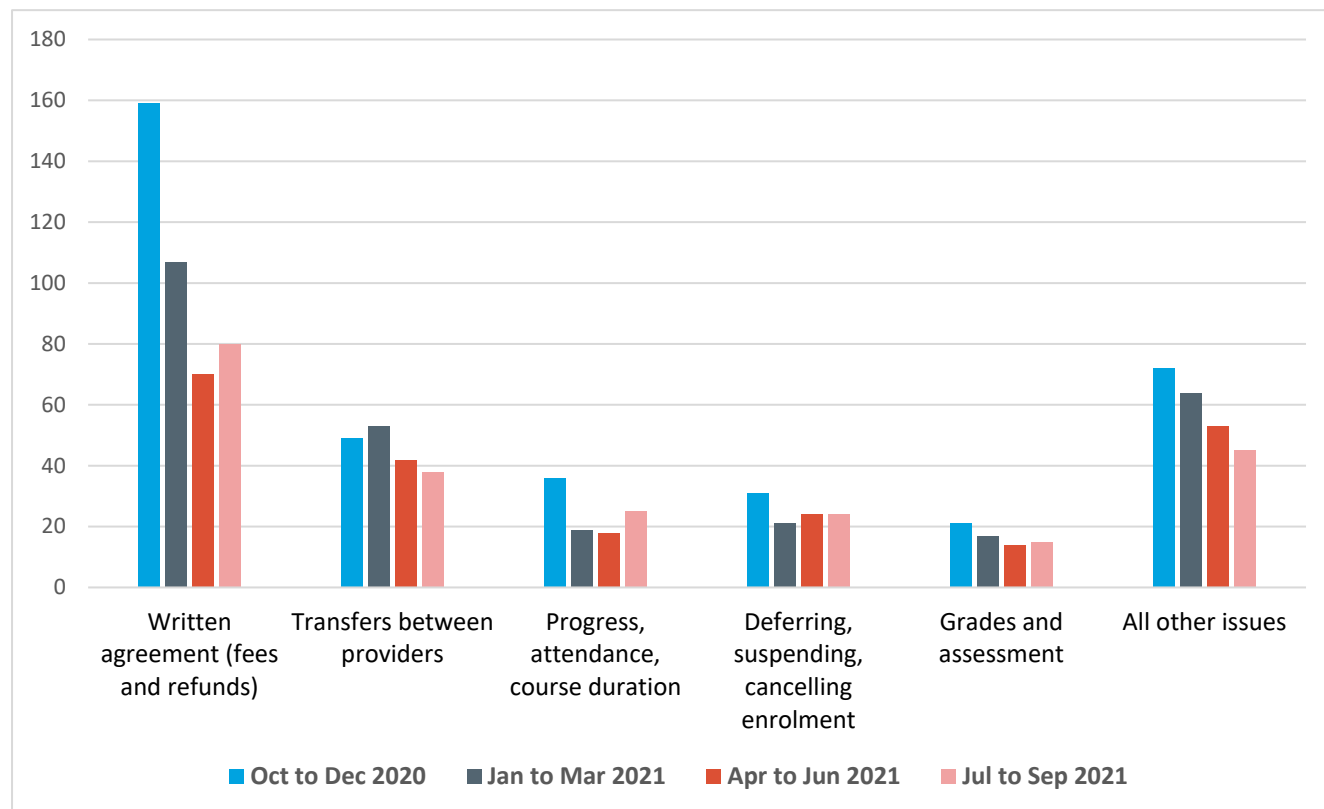
Figure 1: Complaints¹ and enquiries received by quarter



Complaint issues

The most common issue in complaints to the Office between 1 July and 30 September 2021 was written agreements (fees and refunds). These complaints were typically from students seeking refunds of pre-paid tuition fees where they ceased their study before finishing their course. Figure 2 below shows common complaint issues for the last 4 quarters.

¹ Includes complaints about private overseas education providers. For definitions of complaints, views, issues and other terms, please refer to [Overseas Students - Commonwealth Ombudsman](#). Our data is dynamic and regularly updated. This means there may be minor differences when compared to the last quarterly update. Previous quarterly updates are available on the Ombudsman's [website](#).

Figure 2: Common complaint issues – comparative data for 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021

Did providers meet their responsibilities to students?

When delivering education products and services for overseas students, education providers have a responsibility to treat students fairly, reasonably and act consistently with relevant legislation and national standards. During the period from 1 July to 30 September 2021, the Office finalised 35 complaint investigations, covering 54 issues. Table 1 summarises our view about whether providers met their responsibilities to their students for each issue in the investigations we finalised during this period.

Table 1: Views on finalised investigations: 1 July–30 September 2021

View	Total issues
Provider substantially met responsibilities to student	11
Provider did not substantially meet responsibilities to student	28
No view – provider and student resolved matter between them or we otherwise discontinued the investigation	15

Case study – Academic issue

A provider applied a “failed” grade to an assignment a student submitted, alleging it was copied from another source and breached the provider’s academic integrity rules. The student appealed the decision, but the provider’s internal review process upheld the original outcome.

The student contacted our Office to complain the decision was unfair because, in their view, the provider had not given any evidence to support or explain its decision.

It is not the Office’s role to make academic merit decisions, assess competency or alter grades. However, we explained we may consider whether the provider afforded the student the opportunity to respond (‘procedural fairness’) to its proposed decision before applying such a penalty. The Office can also consider whether the provider has an effective and transparent complaint handling and review process and whether it managed the matter consistently with these guidelines.

In response to our contact, the provider explained this was the second occasion it had found significant similarities between the student’s submitted assignment and the work of other students. The provider further explained the process it had followed to make the decision and how it adhered to this process when the student complained.

We considered the provider’s response, together with its guidelines and the relevant legislation. In this case, we concluded the provider had complied with its obligations. We then explained to the student we considered the provider’s actions and decision were reasonable in the circumstances.

Changes to this quarterly update

We recently simplified the format of our Quarterly Updates and removed some figures that were included in previous reports. This new format focuses on key complaint issues and complaints received and closed during the quarter. We will continue to provide an expanded summary of complaints figures, issues and additional information at the end of each financial year.

We want to ensure this reporting is useful to consumers, industry and stakeholders. We welcome feedback about these changes to Overseas.Students@ombudsman.gov.au.