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# COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN

## VET STUDENT LOANS



### Provider e-newsletter – July 2020

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#### In this edition

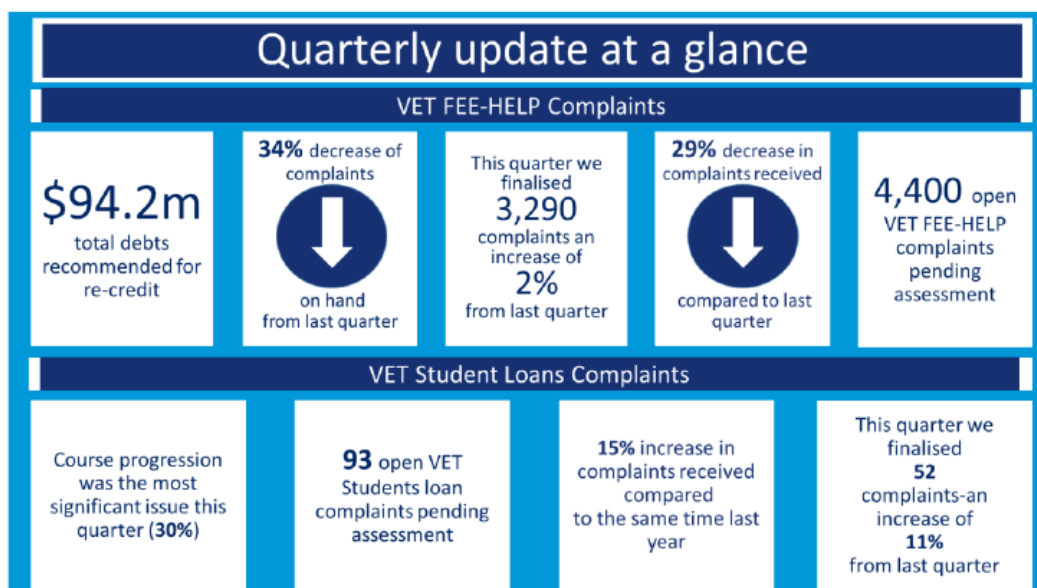
Welcome to the July edition of the VET Student Loans Ombudsman newsletter. In this edition we cover:

- VET Student Loans Ombudsman quarterly update January–March 2020
- Changes to our contact hours and methods
- VET FEE-HELP Student Redress Measures – status of assessment
- VET FEE-HELP Student Redress Measures – promotion
- Case study
- Spotlight on Responsiveness in complaint handling

#### VET Student Loans quarterly update

The [VET Student Loans quarterly update for January–March 2020](#) is available on our website and we are working on preparing the April–June 2020 update.

Our updates provide information on the complaints we have received and finalised, as well as common issues that were complained about during the quarter. If you haven't accessed our reports before, the below is an update at a glance for January–March 2020 and shows the sort of information they provide.



## Changes to our contact hours and methods

We have made some temporary alterations to our contact hours and the ways in which students can reach our Office. We are still taking complaints from students, however in the interest of community health we are not accepting face-to-face appointments at any of our offices. Students can lodge a complaint using our [online complaint form](#). If a student is unable to complete the online form, they can call 1300 362 072.

Due to the impacts of COVID our phone service is currently limited to 9am to 12 noon Australian Eastern Standard Time, Monday to Friday.

More information on how to contact our Office can be found on our [website](#).

Thank you for your understanding while we navigate this challenging time together.

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## VET FEE-HELP Student Redress Measures – status of assessment

On 1 January 2019, the VET FEE-HELP Student Redress Measures (the redress measures) came into effect. The measures provide a remedy for students who, due to the inappropriate conduct of their VET provider, incurred debts under the VET FEE-HELP scheme.

Under the redress measures, we assess complaints and decide whether we will make recommendations to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (the department) to remove individual VET FEE-HELP debts.

As at 30 June 2020, we had recommended the removal of VET FEE-HELP debts for approximately 7,730 complaints, comprising of over 47,806 units of study under the redress measures. The total value of this debt was around \$122.4 million, including \$102.1 million in tuition fees and \$2.3 million in loan fees.

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## VET FEE-HELP Student Redress Measures – promotion

Under current legislation, the redress measures will only be available for students who make a complaint to the Office before 31 December 2020.

We are contacting stakeholders including community support groups, government agencies and peak industry bodies to remind them of the end of the redress measures and encourage stakeholders who might have a wrongful VET FEE-HELP debt to contact our Office for assistance. To date, we have been in contact with around 300 organisations and provided further information to approximately 100 organisations, who have agreed to help with the promotion of the redress measures. We plan on continuing this outreach until the end of December 2020.

We have developed two posters for this campaign that can be accessed through the links below:

- [VET FEE-HELP campaign poster](#)
- [Indigenous VET FEE-HELP campaign poster](#)

You can help with promoting the measures - please forward these posters to your networks and put them up in public locations in your organisation.

[VET.StudentLoans@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:VET.StudentLoans@ombudsman.gov.au)

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## VET FEE-HELP Case study

Ron\* approached us after he discovered he had a VET FEE-HELP debt of \$14,400 while completing his tax returns, after neglecting to do so for some years. In his complaint, Ron stated that he had never applied to do the course in question and believed that someone else had signed him up for it. Ron also told us that on discovering this debt he had contacted the education provider concerned and asked them to re-credit the debt, but the provider had refused to review the case.

We asked the provider to forward any documentation from the time that Ron was supposed to have enrolled in the course, including a written agreement, Confirmation of Enrolment (CoE) or Commonwealth Assistance Notice (CAN). The provider advised that it had limited paperwork regarding Ron's enrolment and could not demonstrate that it had provided a CAN for Ron.

As a result of our investigation we identified several areas in which the provider had contravened legislation in relation to the manner in which Ron's enrolment was processed. On informing the provider of these shortcomings, they agreed to remit the debt.

Ron's case was assessed under rules applicable to VET FEE-HELP approved providers, but good record keeping practices are equally important for VET Student Loans approved providers. Approved course providers must keep documents and information related to the operation of the VET Student Loans Act 2016 and VET Student Loans Rules 2016. These documents must be kept for seven years or as otherwise specified. More information on record keeping for VET Student Loan providers can be found at this link: <https://docs.employment.gov.au/documents/quick-guide-record-keeping>.

\*Identifying information changed for privacy purposes.

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## Spotlight on: Developing a culture that values complaints

An effective complaint management framework requires a culture that respects and values the rights and viewpoints of complainants.

Best practice complaint management frameworks embrace an attitude that complaints can be a valuable source of feedback. Complaint handling should be about fixing issues and focusing on improving systems while being transparent with complainants.



Complainants are often hesitant to raise their concerns, but having a culture that is clearly open to feedback can help them feel free to share their valuable observations.

Does your organisation value complaints and feedback from students?

You can read more about complaint handling in our [Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling](#) on the [Commonwealth Ombudsman website](#)

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One of the responsibilities of the VET Student Loans Ombudsman is to develop, promote and review a code of practice for VET student loan scheme providers, in relation to VET loan assistance and associated complaint handling.

We have commenced consultation on the code of practice and are looking for education providers to contribute their experience with the VET student loan scheme and identify gaps in the existing framework or suggest best practices which could be embodied in the code.

If you would like to contribute or have any questions, please email us at [VSL.codeofpractice@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:VSL.codeofpractice@ombudsman.gov.au).

Once we have compiled a draft code, we will release the draft for consultation to give you further opportunities to contribute.

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