

Tips for making a complaint

The National Student Ombudsman (NSO) is a free and independent complaints service for students. We resolve complaints from students about the actions of higher education providers. Where there are no barriers to doing so, we encourage students to approach their provider first about the complaint because this is often the most effective way to resolve a complaint.

Raising an issue, discussing a concern or making a complaint

Did you know that you can get support and advice from student services, and student advocates, when making a complaint about your higher education provider? This includes advice and support for both informal and formal complaint processes.

An **informal** complaint means raising the issue directly with the person or people involved. It generally doesn't include official documentation or reporting. Some providers may refer to this as 'local level resolution'. For example, talking with a lecturer, unit convener or tutor.

A **formal** complaint uses the official process set out by a provider. Each provider is required to have a policy that sets out how they deal with student complaints and to clearly explain the steps a student needs to take. The policy should include what is and isn't covered, timeframes and available support. Complaint processes vary between providers and may have different names. Complaints may be referred to as 'grievances', 'reports', or an 'appeal'.

When making a complaint, it is helpful to:

- Document what happened or what the issue is, and why it is a problem.
- Put the details in the order they happened, including when you first became aware of the issue and how you tried to resolve it. Include who you spoke to, when you spoke with them, and what was discussed.
- Explain how you have been impacted, academically, financially and/or personally.
- Think about the outcome you want to resolve the situation. For example, if you have received an incorrect transcript, the outcome could be an acknowledgement of the errors made and an amendment to the transcript.

Evidence: Information and documents to support your complaint

Check the complaint policy or procedure for what information and evidence to include.

Evidence may be emails, letters, forms, receipts, photos, screenshots, or verbal evidence. Only include information that is relevant to your complaint. If you are attaching files, it helps to give them meaningful names.

What happens next?

The complexity of your complaint may impact the time it takes for it to be resolved. You can ask your provider how your complaint is progressing, remembering to:

- Keep your complaint reference number somewhere you can easily access it.
- Make notes of conversations you have with your provider about the complaint, including the time and date, details of what you discussed, as well as the name and role of the person you spoke with.

If you are unhappy with the outcome of the formal complaint process, you can:

- Ask to appeal the decision. Your provider may have different policies and processes for appealing decisions. These can include, new evidence, concerns about how the original complaint was handled, or an unreasonable decision.
- Escalate the matter externally to the NSO. In most instances, we will expect students to have formally raised the matter with their provider first, but sometimes students have good reasons to come straight to the NSO. For more information visit nso.gov.au.

