



Intervention strategies  
for students at risk of  
unsatisfactory course progress

# Commonwealth Ombudsman

The Commonwealth Ombudsman usually **helps resolve** complaints about Australian Federal Government agencies.

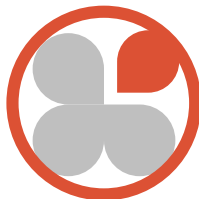
We have some specialist roles, including:

- Overseas Students Ombudsman
- VET Student Loans Ombudsman

Our **investigations** are:



**FREE**



**INDEPENDENT**



**IMPARTIAL**

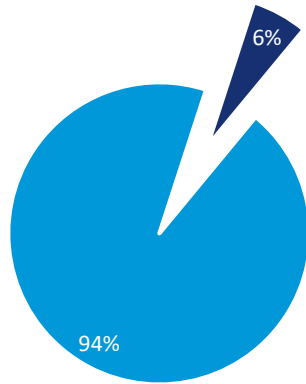
# Overseas Students Ombudsman

## Non-investigative roles

1. To give advice and training about the best practice for the handling of complaints to CRICOS approved private education providers
2. To report on trends and systemic issues we observe through our complaint-handling

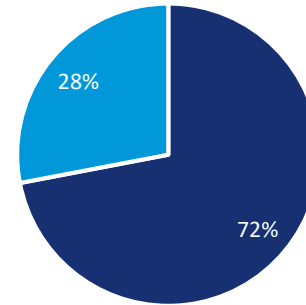
# Some statistics about course monitoring complaints

Complaint issues 2018-19



■ Monitoring course progress ■ All other issues

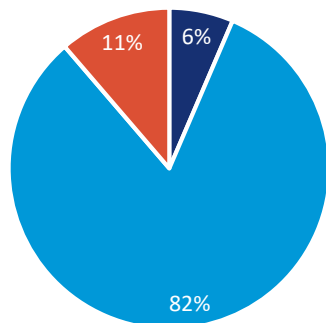
Progress monitoring complaints - investigation status 2018-19



■ Investigated ■ Not investigated

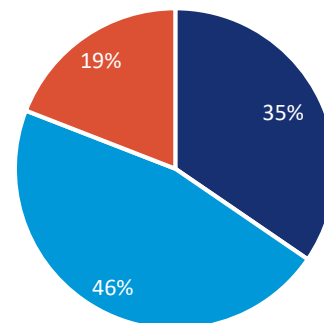
# Ombudsman views on finalised complaints

Course progress investigations finalised,  
2018-19



- Provider did not meet responsibilities
- Provider met responsibilities
- No view

Investigations finalised, all issues,  
2018-19



- Provider did not meet responsibilities
- Provider met responsibilities
- No view

# Monitoring progress - pitfalls



## What do complaints show us?

- Providers not implementing an intervention strategy
- Providers not intervening in time for students to achieve satisfactory course progress
- Providers not following their own policies and procedures

# Monitoring progress - pitfalls

## Definitions

- Poorly defined requirement for unsatisfactory progress: e.g. not competent/fail 50% of units in a study period
- Same definition for 'at risk' and 'unsatisfactory'
- Undefined 'study period'



# Monitoring progress - pitfalls

## Other deficiencies

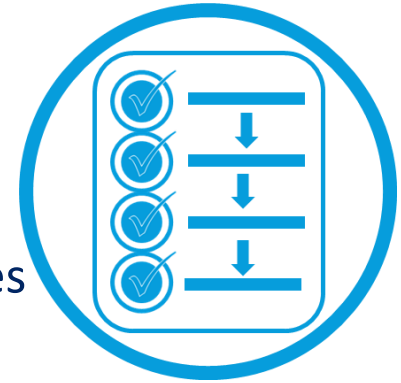
- Providers allowing unsatisfactory course progress to continue without intervention or reporting
- Providers not telling students that effect of reporting is cancellation
- Provider reporting for course progress when student didn't commence study in course or study period

Withdrawal from studies does not remove provider's obligation to report in PRISMS

# Monitoring progress – good policy

## Policies and procedures

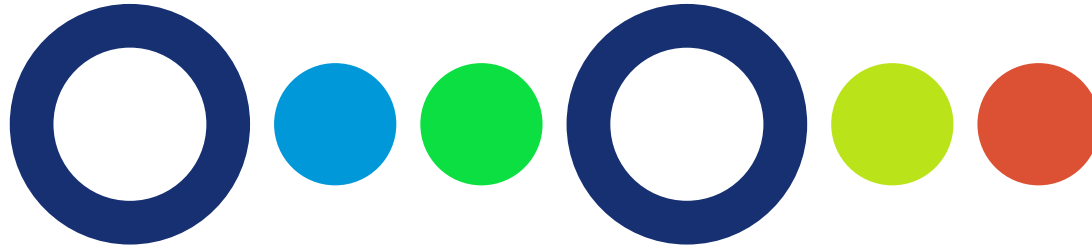
- Compliant and comprehensive policies and procedures which have wide organisational buy-in
- Well defined 'study period' (e.g. year, semester, trimester, term)
- Well defined reporting threshold (e.g. two consecutive study periods, failed unit more than once)
- Clearly defined 'at risk' students, e.g.
  - Failed assessment task
  - Low attendance (even if monitoring not required e.g. Higher Education), lack of participation in tutorials



# Monitoring progress – good policy

## Definitions

- Identified point at which status is assessed for all students, e.g. end of study period
- Clear policy on how students will be notified (e.g. via study portal, letter, email, etc)



# Formal interventions



## Strategies include:

- Making a contract with student as part of intervention plan
- Mandatory counselling/ meetings with student advisors
- Mandatory workshops – study skills, time management skills, cognitive skills, essay and report writing skills, research skills, English language skills
- Minimum attendance requirements

# Formal interventions

## Other supportive strategies:

- Peer mentoring, placement in study groups
- One-on-one learning support
- Supplementary assessments, opportunity for re-assessments
- Allowing students to attend missed classes
- Assistance with personal issues including referrals to support services
- Reduced study load
- Considering a change of course



# Consideration of exceptional circumstances

- Ability to consider compassionate and compelling circumstances
- Consideration of retrospective deferral
- Exclusion



# Student status while under caution



- Different levels of academic standing, e.g. good standing, probation, under caution. Some providers place conditions on the student's enrolment
- Clear statement of student enrolment status during appeals process (if student will be reported)

# Case study

## Nancy's complaint\*

- Nancy's grades and attendance had been declining
- Nancy's provider tried to engage her in an intervention strategy
- Her provider had advised Nancy that she would be reported
- Nancy appealed the provider's decision but the provider upheld their original decision
- Nancy made a complaint to us about her provider's decision to report her

\*Details changed for privacy purposes

# Case study

## Our investigation

- We investigated Nancy's complaint
- We requested documentation from Nancy's provider
- Nancy also provided us with documentation
- The provider was thorough and responded with in-depth information

# Case study

## What we found

- Poor academic progress and worsening attendance
- Lack of connection with provider support services
- Repeated attempts by provider to engage with the student
- Provider followed their own policies and procedures

# Case study

## What did the provider do well?

- Well-planned procedure for early intervention
- Consistent attempts to contact and connect Nancy with assistance
- Good record keeping
- Followed their own policy and procedure in line with the National Code

# Case study

## How could the provider improve?

- Ensure that letters about course progress and intervention strategy were inviting and supportive rather than threatening
- Try a more personal approach via lecturers/tutors/student services when Nancy did come to class

# Case study

## Closing comments

- The role of the Ombudsman in this case
- Our findings
- How might this have worked out differently?



Questions?