

Senate Committee: Education and Employment

QUESTION ON NOTICE Additional Estimates 2015 - 2016

Outcome: Skills and Training

Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ16-000588

Senator Carr, Kim provided in writing.

National Training Complaints Hotline

Question

- How many calls has the hotline received?
- Please provide a breakdown of issues raised on the hotline.
- Has any call to the hotline resulted in any action for a student?
- If a caller to the hotline was asking about the collapse of their training provider, is it appropriate for the hotline to refer the student to read legislation?
- If a student was calling regarding the financial collapse of their training provider, what would the appropriate response be?

Answers

The National Training Complaints Hotline (hotline) was officially launched on 20 January 2015. As at 24 February 2016, the hotline had received 798 calls.

The majority of these issues raised in complaints to the hotline fall into three overarching themes of: quality of training; unethical practices – VET FEE-HELP registered training organisations (RTOs) and brokers; and RTO practices.

The hotline is a referral service. Callers' complaints are assessed and referred to the most appropriate agency, authority or jurisdiction for consideration and resolution. An acknowledgement email is sent to the caller advising them of the agency to which their complaint has been referred.

Where a registered training organisation (RTO) closes and it was an approved VET FEE-HELP or an overseas student provider, the hotline would refer the students to the area of the department that administers VET FEE-HELP, or to the Overseas Student Ombudsman, for advice and assistance. There are two schemes in place to protect VET FEE-HELP and overseas students.

The Tuition Assurance Process

- If a provider ceases to provide a VET course of study, the TAS provides a mechanism to give currently enrolled students the option to complete their course or request to have their VET FEE-HELP debt remitted for uncompleted units of study.
- Under Schedule 1A to the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA) and related VET Guidelines, providers are required to maintain sufficient tuition assurance to cover their student load.
- The vast majority of providers are covered by tuition assurance schemes administered by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) or TAFE Directors of Australia (TDA).

- Should tuition assurance be needed ACPET or TDA will advise students of their options, and administer the process.
- For those students who wish to continue their studies, the TAS administrator will seek to match and offer students placements in similar courses.

For international students, the Government has in place a comprehensive suite of protection mechanisms to safeguard the interests of international students under the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000*. Providers are required to assist the student to enrol in a suitable alternative course (with unspent pre-paid tuition fees transferred to the new provider) or to receive a refund of their unspent pre-paid tuition fees. This requirement is underwritten by the Tuition Protection Service. Further details of this can be found at www.tps.gov.au.