



# International students – fees and refunds

This fact sheet is all about **fees and refunds**. It includes answers to common questions we receive from international students when they disagree with their education providers about fees and refunds.

## If I withdraw from my course will I get a refund?

This depends on what your **written agreement** says. Some providers will pay a refund if you withdraw before, or even after your course starts, but other providers will not. Your **rights and obligations** should be set out in your written agreement.

If you don't have a copy of your written agreement, ask your provider for one. If you accepted your written agreement after 1 January 2018, it is your obligation to keep a copy of the agreement.

## My visa was refused, can I get a refund?

Yes. If your student visa has been refused and this is the reason you have withdrawn from your course, you are entitled to a refund regardless of why your visa was refused.

If your visa is refused before you start your course, you are entitled to a full refund of your course fees less an administrative fee of no more than five per cent or \$500 (whichever is the lesser amount).

If your visa is refused after you start your course, you are entitled to a refund of the fees paid for the part of your course after the date of your withdrawal.

## How much money can my education provider ask me to pay before I start my course?

If your course is more than 25 weeks, your education provider cannot require you to pay more than half the total tuition fees before you start. You can choose to pay more than half of your fees before you start, but you don't have to. Your provider cannot accept any money from you before you accept the written agreement.

If your course is 25 weeks or less your provider can require you to pay the full course fee before you start.

Regardless of the length of your course, once you have started the course, your provider can require you to pay all course fees.

## How to avoid a dispute with your provider over fees and refunds

Make sure you understand what your **written agreement** says about fees, refunds and withdrawing from a course. Your written agreement must tell you how to apply for a refund. It is important to apply for a refund in the correct way. Usually a refund application must be made in writing and sometimes providers have a special form.

### Contact us

[ombudsman.gov.au](http://ombudsman.gov.au)  
1300 362 072

GPO Box 442  
Canberra ACT 2601

### Check your written agreement.

Your written agreement should outline your provider's refund policy and how to apply for a refund.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman is a free service

Have you seen our video? Scan the QR code to watch



If your provider decides that you are not entitled to a refund and you think that decision is wrong, you can make a complaint through your provider's **internal** complaints and appeals process. It is important to explain clearly why you think your education provider made the wrong decision and why you think you are entitled to a refund.

You can also use your education provider's complaints and appeals process if you think your provider is wrongly pursuing you for a cancellation fee.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of that process, and you still think your provider is wrong, you can make a complaint to an **external** complaints body like the Commonwealth Ombudsman, about what has happened.

### How do I make an external complaint?

If you are an international student studying with a **private education provider**, you can complain to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. The Ombudsman investigates complaints about problems that intending, current or former students may have with private schools, colleges or universities (education providers) in Australia. You can fill out our online form or phone us **1300 362 072**. For more information about how to complain and how to contact us, visit **ombudsman.gov.au**

If you are an international student or a domestic student studying with a **public (government) education provider** you can complain to the appropriate [state or territory ombudsman](#)<sup>1</sup>.

### Who else can help me?

You can find a list of [useful links](#)<sup>2</sup> to other organisations that may be able to help you on our website.

### Case studies

Hanne\*, who came to study in Australia from Denmark, complained to our Office that her education provider would not give her a refund after she withdrew from her course. We asked the provider for a copy of the written agreement. The provider told us that it did not make a written agreement with Hanne for the course from which she withdrew. Instead, the provider relied on an earlier written agreement, in relation to an earlier offering of the same course, and from which Hanne had also withdrawn. In this case, the study periods and the course fees had both changed since the earlier agreement was accepted. The provider therefore could not rely on the earlier written agreement. We recommended the provider pay Hanne a refund. The provider accepted our recommendation and paid a refund to Hanne.

Johnathon\*, who came to study in Australia from Malaysia, enrolled with an education provider and decided to change courses after he started. The written agreement said that students were not entitled to a refund of fees after course commencement. The written agreement was compliant with the law and we upheld the provider's decision. Johnathon did not get a refund.

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More information is available at [ombudsman.gov.au](#).

Please note: This document is intended as a guide only. For this reason, the information should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases. To the maximum extent permitted by the law, the Commonwealth Ombudsman is not liable to you for any loss or damage suffered as a result of reliance on this document. For the most up-to-date versions of cited Acts, please refer to the [Federal Register of Legislation](#).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/What-we-do/related-sites>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/How-we-can-help/overseas-students/useful-links>

\* Name and country has been changed to protect privacy