

Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment
Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Outcome: Fair Work Ombudsman

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Question No. IQ25-000023

Senator Mehreen Faruqi provided in writing.

Proactive audits of universities

Question

1. In Senate estimates in 2023, the Ombudsman agreed that it was not possible to keep relying on self-reporting from universities and that the Ombudsman needed to be better resourced to do pro-active audits into universities.
 - a. Have you received any additional resources to conduct proactive audits of universities?
 - b. Have any of these audits taken place?

Answer

The Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) has provided the following response.

The FWO has been proactive in its approach to building a culture of compliance in this sector, including by:

- Writing to the Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors of 42 Australian universities.
- Regularly updating our higher education sector website content to address issues in the sector we have identified through our proactive initiatives to ensure workplace participants understand their rights and obligations.
- Establishing a Higher Education Reference Group.
- Engaging with peak bodies and government agencies to address issues and drive a culture of compliance in the sector.

As of 20 November 2025, the FWO has:

- Been in contact with all 42 universities in relation to potential underpayments.
- Accepted 8 Enforceable Undertakings from universities, requiring universities to repay workers and implement a range of measures to ensure compliance with workplace laws.
- Commenced litigation against two universities.
- 27 ongoing investigations into universities.

As of 20 November 2025, the FWO has recovered over \$237 million for more than 118,000 employees in the higher education sector (since 1 July 2019).