

SC4-IE: Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedures

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Purpose

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to outline Hunter Education Group's approach to managing dissatisfaction, formal complaints and appeals of students, clients, staff and other members of the community. It provides a transparent approach for all complaints and appeals to be addressed in a fair, efficient and confidential manner.

This policy and procedure ensures compliance with Standard 6 of the Standards, as well as compliance with the of the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018, Standard 10 and the English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS) Standards 2018 Standard P8.

Definitions

ASQA means Australian Skills Quality Authority, the national VET regulator and the RTO's registering body

Appeal means a request for a decision made by Hunter Education Group to be reviewed

DET means Department of Education and Training

ELICOS Standards means the English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS) Standards 2018

Complaint means a person's formal expression of dissatisfaction with any product or service provided by Hunter Education Group.

PRISMS means Provider Registration and International Students Management System

Overseas Student means someone who is studying in Australia on a student visa. An overseas student is also called an international student.

Services means training, assessment, related educational and support services and/or activities related to the recruitment of prospective learners. It does not include services such as student counselling, mediation or ICT support

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Standards means the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 from the VET Quality Framework

Policy

1. Nature of complaints and appeals

- Hunter Education Group responds to all allegations involving the conduct of:
 - Hunter Education Group, its trainers and assessors and other staff.
 - Any third party providing Services on behalf of Hunter Education Group and including education agents.
- Any student or client of Hunter Education Group.
- Complaints may be made in relation to any of Hunter Education Group's services and activities such as:
 - the application and enrolment process
 - marketing information
 - the quality of training/teaching and assessment provided
 - training/teaching and assessment matters, including student progress, student support and assessment requirements
 - the way someone has been treated
 - the actions of another student
- An appeal is a request for a decision made by Hunter Education Group to be reviewed. Decisions may have been about:
 - course admissions
 - refund assessments
 - response to a complaint
 - assessment outcomes / results
 - other general decisions made by Hunter Education Group

2. Principles of resolution

- Hunter Education Group is committed to developing a procedurally fair complaints and appeals process that is carried out free from bias, following the principles of natural justice. Through this policy and procedure, Hunter Education Group ensures that complaints and appeals:
 - Are responded to in a professional, consistent and transparent manner.
 - Are responded to promptly, fairly, objectively, with sensitivity and confidentiality.
 - Are able to be made at no cost to the individual.
 - Are used as an opportunity to identify potential causes of the complaint or appeal and take actions to prevent the issues from recurring as well as identifying any areas for improvement.
- Hunter Education Group will inform all persons or parties involved in any allegations made as well as providing them with an opportunity to present their side of the matter.
- There are no charges for students to submit, a complaint or appeal to Hunter Education Group, or to seek information or advice about doing so.
- Nothing in this policy and procedure limits the rights of an individual to take action under Australia's Consumer Protection laws and it does not circumscribe an individual's rights to pursue other legal remedies.

3. Making a complaint of appeal

- Complaints about a particular incident should be made as soon as possible after the incident occurring and appeals must be made within thirty (30) calendar days of the original decision being made.

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- Complaints and appeals should be made in writing using the *Complaints and Appeals Form*, or other written format and sent to Hunter Education Group's head office at 27 Centenary Rd, Newcastle 2300 attention to the Managing Director.

When making a complaint or appeal, provide as much information as possible to enable Hunter Education Group to investigate and determine an appropriate solution. This should include:

- The issue you are complaining about or the decision you are appealing – describe what happened and how it affected you.
- Any evidence you have to support your complaint or appeal.
- Details about the steps you have already taken to resolve the issue.
- Suggestions about how the matter might be resolved.

4. Timeframes for resolution

- The complaint or appeal will be acknowledged in writing within 3 business days.
- The complaints and appeals process will commence within 10 business days of receipt of the application. Complaints and appeals will be finalised as soon as practicable or at least within 30 calendar days unless there is a significant reason for the matter to take longer.
- In matters where additional time is needed, the complainant or appellant will be advised in writing of the reasons and will be updated weekly on the progress of the matter until such a time that the matter is resolved.

5. Resolution of complaints and appeals

- Some or all members of the management team of Hunter Education Group will be involved in resolving complaints and appeals as outlined in the procedures.
- Where a complaint or appeal involves another individual or organisation, they will be given the opportunity to respond to any allegations made.
- Where a third party delivering Services on behalf of the RTO is involved, they will also be included in the process of resolving the complaint or appeal.
- Each party involved in the complaint or appeal may have a support person of their choice present at meetings scheduled to resolve the issue.
- In the case of an assessment appeal, an assessor who is independent from the original decision will assess the original task again. The outcome of this assessment will be the result granted for the assessment task. The complainant or appellant will be advised in writing of the outcome of the process and the reasons for the findings made.
- The enrolment status of student will be handled as follows:
 - For domestic students that choose to access this policy and procedure, Hunter Education Group will maintain the student's enrolment while the complaints and appeals process is ongoing.
 - For international students, Hunter Education Group will maintain a student's enrolment throughout the internal appeals processes without notifying DET via PRISMS of a change in enrolment status. In the case of an external appeals process it will depend on the type of appeal as to whether Hunter Education Group maintains the student's enrolment as follows:
 - If the appeal is against Hunter Education Group's decision to report the student for unsatisfactory course progress or attendance, the student's enrolment will be maintained until the external process is completed and has supported or not supported Hunter Education Group's decision to report.
 - If the appeal is against Hunter Education Group's decision to defer, suspend or cancel a student's enrolment due to misbehaviour, Hunter Education Group will notify DET via

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PRISMS of a change to the student's enrolment after the outcome of the internal appeals process

6. Independent Parties

- Hunter Education Group acknowledges the need for an appropriate independent party to be appointed to review a matter where this is requested by the complainant or appellant and the internal processes have failed to resolve the matter. Costs associated with independent parties to review a matter must be covered by the complainant/appellant unless the decision to include an independent party was made by Hunter Education Group. (You can change this if you like so that either the individual pays or the organisation pays – as long as this is made clear)
 - For domestic students, the independent party recommended by Hunter Education Group is The National Student Ombudsman, whose service is free of charge, however complainants and appellants are able to use their own external party at their own cost. Domestic students may also access the external complaint avenues indicated below free of charge.
 - For international students, the independent party is the Overseas Students Ombudsman. This service is free of charge. Where an international student is not satisfied with the outcome or conduct of the internal process, they are referred to the Overseas Students Ombudsman (OSO). See information under external complaint avenues.
 - Hunter Education Group will provide complete cooperation with the external mediator investigating the complaint/appeal and will be bound by the recommendations arising out of this process.
 - The Managing Director will ensure that any recommendations made are implemented within twenty (20) days of being notified of the recommendations. The complainant or appellant will also be formally notified in writing of the outcome of the mediation, and any recommendations being actioned by Hunter Education Group.

7. External complaint avenues

- Complaints can also be made via the following avenues:
 - National Training Complaints Hotline:

The National Training Complaints Hotline is a national service for consumers to register complaints concerning vocational education and training. The service refers consumers to the appropriate agency/authority/jurisdiction to assist with their complaint. Consumers can register a complaint with the National Training Complaints Hotline by:

 - Phone: 13 38 73, Monday–Friday, 8am to 6pm nationally.
 - Email: ntch@education.gov.au
 - Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA):

Complainants may also complain to Hunter Education Group's registering body, Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). However, ASQA does not act as an advocate for individual students and is not responsible for resolving disputes between students and training providers. ASQA uses information from all complaints as intelligence to inform regulatory activities and will generally refer students to another organisation for resolution of complaints.

For more information, refer to the relevant webpage below before making a complaint to ASQA:

<https://www.asqa.gov.au/complaints>
 - The Overseas Student Ombudsman (OSO) or National Student Ombudsman (NSO)

Students may complain to the OSO/NSO if their complaint is in relation to Hunter Education Group:

 - refusing admission to a course
 - course fees and refunds
 - course or provider transfers

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- course progress or attendance
- cancellation of enrolment
- accommodation or work arranged by your provider
- incorrect advice given by an education agent.
- if you believe we have failed to take action or are taking too long to take some action. This might include (for example), failing to provide your results in the normal timeframe, or failing to provide services included your written agreement with Hunter Education Group.

The OSO/NSO may not be able to investigate your complaint if you have not already exhausted our formal internal complaints process as above.

Please refer to the following website if you are considering making a complaint:

<http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/making-a-complaint/overseas-students#quality-of-education-provider>

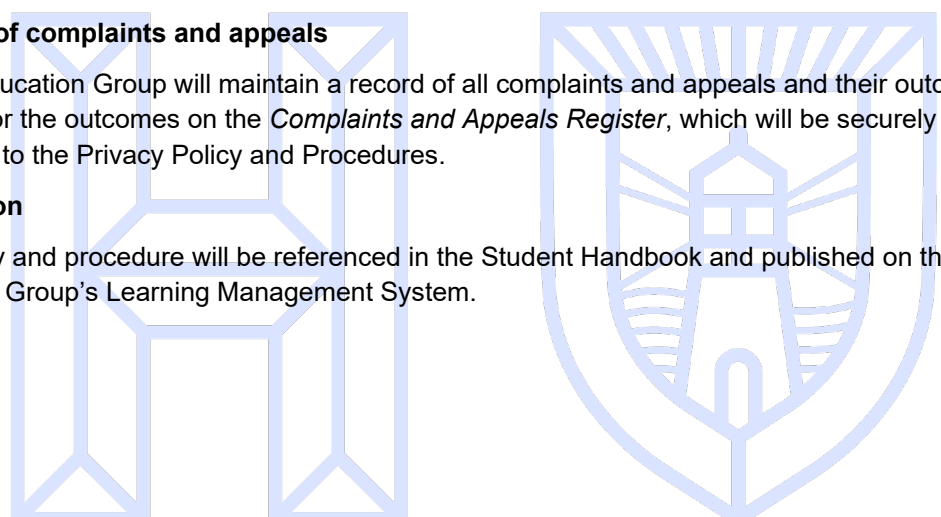
<https://www.education.gov.au/national-student-ombudsman>

8. Records of complaints and appeals

Hunter Education Group will maintain a record of all complaints and appeals and their outcomes and reasons for the outcomes on the *Complaints and Appeals Register*, which will be securely stored according to the Privacy Policy and Procedures.

9. Publication

This policy and procedure will be referenced in the Student Handbook and published on the Hunter Education Group's Learning Management System.



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Procedures

1. Complaints management

Procedure	Responsibility
A. Receive and acknowledge complaint - As per policy, complaints are to be made in writing by the complainant, attention to the Managing Director. - The Managing Director should review all complaints upon receipt. - Acknowledge receipt of complaint in writing by sending a letter to complainant within 3 working days of receipt. Use <i>Complaint/ Appeal Acknowledgement Letter</i>. - Record details of the complaint on the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i>. - Commence process of investigation within 10 days of receiving the complaint.	Managing Director and Administration Team
B. Investigate the complaint - Upon receiving the complaint, the matter is to be investigated to ensure all relevant information is available and it is accurate and complete. - Further details from the complainant, respondent or other involved parties may be requested during this stage. This may be in writing, over the phone, or face-to-face. Where the meeting is face to face, the complainant may be accompanied by a support person. - If the matter is in relation to a third party delivering Services on behalf of the RTO, the third party should be involved in the resolution of the complaint. - The investigation will also identify corrective and preventative action which will be immediately implemented as per the next section of this procedure. - The Managing Director will review the information and decide on an appropriate response. Where deemed necessary by the Managing Director, the matter may be reviewed by other members of the management team to arrive at an appropriate resolution. - Note: The complaint must be completely resolved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the original complaint. If the matter is particularly complex and it is going to take longer to resolve, the complainant is to be advised in writing along with reasons for the extra time. They must be provided with updates on progress on a weekly basis thereafter until the matter is resolved.	Managing Director
C. Advise of the outcome and update records - Provide a written response to the complainant outlining: - The RTO's understanding of the complaint - The steps taken to investigate and resolve the complaint - Decisions made about resolution, with reasons for the decisions made - Areas that have been identified as possible causes of the complaint and improvements to be recommended - Their right to access the appeals process if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaints process. - Update the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i> so it includes the outcome of the complaint and showing the decision that has been made, as well as any corrective/preventative actions identify to address the issue.	Managing Director or their delegate

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Procedure	Responsibility
- Update the <i>Continuous Improvement Register</i> showing the decision that has been made in relation to the complaint, as well as any corrective/preventative actions identified to address the issue. - Keep a copy of the complaint and supporting documents in the Complaints file and in the student or staff file (where relevant). - Immediately implement actions related to decisions that supports the student and/or corrective or preventative actions required.	

2. Appeals management

Procedure	Responsibility
A. Receive and acknowledge appeal - Upon receipt of a request for an appeal, acknowledge receipt of appeal in writing by sending a letter to appellant within 3 working days of receipt to ensure appellant receives it within 7 days. Use <i>Complaint/Appeal Acknowledgement Letter</i>. - Record details of appeal on the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i>.	Managing Director or their delegate
B. Respond to assessment appeals - In the case of appeals against assessment decisions, the original assessment decision will be reviewed by having an assessor independent of the original decision, mark the assessment task again. - The assessment decision made during the appeals process will be considered the actual assessment outcome for the task. - Advise the student of the outcome of the appeal.	Managing Director, Director of Studies or their delegate
C. Respond to appeals against non-academic decisions - Upon receiving the appeal, the matter is to be investigated to identify the original decision made and the reasons for the decision. - Further details from the appellant, respondent, the person who made the original decision, or other involved parties may be requested during this stage. This may be in writing, over the phone, or face-to-face. - If the matter is in relation to a third party delivering Services on behalf of the RTO, the third party should be involved in the resolution of the appeal. - The appellant may request for an independent party (mediator) to be involved in the process. Where this is requested by the appellant, they will bear the costs associated. Additionally, Hunter Education Group may decide to call upon an independent mediator to assist to resolve the issue where a decision cannot be reached internally. This will be at Hunter Education Group's cost. - Hunter Education Group's Management team will review all relevant information and decide on an appropriate response. - The investigation will also identify corrective and preventative action, which will be immediately implemented as per the next section of this procedure. - Note: The appeal must be resolved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the original appeal. If the matter is particularly complex and it is going to take longer to resolve, the appellant must be advised in writing along with reasons	Management team

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Procedure	Responsibility
for the extra time. They must be provided with progress updates on a weekly basis thereafter until the matter is resolved.	
D. Advise appellant of the outcome and update records • Provide a written response to the appellant outlining: – The RTO's understanding of the reasons for the appeal – The steps taken to investigate and resolve the appeal – Decisions made about resolution and reasons for the decisions – If relevant, areas that have been identified as possible causes of the appeal and improvements to be recommended – Their right to, and information on, the external appeals process. – For international students, the effect on their enrolment status (see enrolment status in policy – 10). • Update the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i> so it includes the outcome of the appeal and showing the decision that has been made, as well as any corrective/preventative actions identify to address the issue. • Update the <i>Continuous Improvement Register</i> showing the decision that has been made in relation to the appeal, as well as any corrective/preventative actions identify to address the issue. • Keep a copy of the complaint and supporting documents in the Complaints file and in the student or staff file (where relevant). • Immediately implement actions related to decisions that supports the student and/or corrective or preventative actions required.	Managing Director or Administration Team

3. External complaint or appeal

Procedure	Responsibility
• External complaint or appeal • If dissatisfied with the internal processes, the complainant/appellant may initiate an external complaint or appeal. • Additionally, a complainant or appellant who has been through the internal processes may request Hunter Education Group to appoint an independent party to review the matter. • All other complainants or appellants can find an appropriate independent party by calling the Resolution Institute on 02 9251 3366 or by searching the following directory, according to locality and area/s of concern: https://www.resolution.institute/australian-directory • For international students, the independent party advised is the Overseas Students Ombudsman, which is free of charge. • Co-operate fully in the process of the external party to investigate and review the matter. This will include and not be limited to providing full access to the relevant student file/s and the internal complaints records where permitted to do so by law. All staff will be instructed to cooperate in such instances and to give an accurate account of the events as they understand them.	Staff as required

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Procedure	Responsibility
Where the decision of the external party supports Hunter Education Group, Hunter Education Group will notify DET via PRISMS of the change in enrolment status.	
B. Review external complaints or appeals - In the event that the external party finds in favour of the student, immediately organise a management meeting to discuss the external process and its outcome. - At the meeting, discuss the decision made and actions to be taken to implement the decision, including both corrective/preventative actions. - Following the meeting immediately implement actions. - Advise the student of the outcome of the complaint or appeal and the actions taken.	Management team

Document Control

Document No. & Name:	SC4-IE - Complaints and Appeals P&P V1.1	0
Quality Area:	SC Students & Clients	
Author:	RTO Advice Group Pty Ltd	
Status:	Approved	
Approved By:	Dary Milani	
Approval Date:	21/04/2025	
Review Date:	21/04/2026	
Standards (SRTOs):	Standard 6, Clause 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 & 6.6	
Standards (National Code):	Standard 10	
Standards (ELICOS Standards)	Standard P8	

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