

Complaints Policy and Associated Procedures

Policy Area:	Complaints and Appeal
Standards Reference:	Outcome Standard 2.7
Responsibility:	CEO, RTO Manager, Trainer & Assessor, Student Support Staff
Classification:	Internal Academic Governance Policy – Complaints, Appeals, and Assessment Integrity

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Complaints Policy and Associated Procedures is to ensure that students and stakeholders are provided with a **clear, accessible, fair, and timely mechanism** to raise complaints relating to any aspect of the Institute of International Studies (IOIS) operations.

This policy establishes a structured process for receiving, managing, investigating, and resolving complaints in a manner that is transparent, impartial, and respectful of all parties involved. It ensures that complaints are treated seriously, handled confidentially, and resolved as quickly as practicable without fear of victimisation or disadvantage to the complainant.

The policy supports procedural fairness by ensuring that complainants are informed of their rights, given the opportunity to present their concerns and supporting evidence, and notified in writing of outcomes and reasons for decisions. Where a complaint cannot be resolved internally, the policy provides clear pathways for escalation to external bodies.

Complaints are also recognised as a valuable source of feedback. IOIS uses complaint outcomes to identify systemic issues, improve service quality, strengthen compliance, and enhance the overall learner and stakeholder experience through continuous improvement processes.

This policy meets the requirements of the **Standards for RTOs 2025**, specifically **Standards 2.7 and 2.8**, relating to learner protection, fair treatment, and access to complaints and appeals processes.

2. DEFINITIONS

- **Complaint** – An expression of dissatisfaction or concern regarding the services, facilities, decisions, actions, or behaviours of IOIS, its staff, students, or any third party acting on behalf of IOIS. Complaints may relate to academic matters, administrative processes, support services, marketing, facilities, or conduct.
- **Complainant** – An individual or organisation that lodges a complaint under this policy. This may include students, prospective students, staff, employers, agents, or other stakeholders.
- **Natural Justice / Procedural Fairness** – The principles that ensure complaints are managed in a fair and unbiased manner. This includes providing all parties with the opportunity to present their case, ensuring decision-makers are impartial, and making decisions based on evidence and established procedures.
- **Third Party** – Any organisation or individual engaged by IOIS to provide services on its behalf, including but not limited to education agents, training and assessment partners, contractors, or service providers.

3. POLICY STATEMENTS

The following detailed statements govern the policy for the management and resolution of all complaints lodged against IOIS, ensuring compliance with Outcome Standard 2.7 (Feedback, complaints, and appeals).

3.1 Scope of Complaint

- **Parties:** A complaint may be lodged against any entity or individual associated with IOIS, including IOIS itself, trainers, assessors, other staff, fellow students, or any third parties delivering services on IOIS's behalf.
- **Subject Matter:** Complaints may relate to any aspect of the VET service provision, including:
 - The quality of training and assessment services.
 - Facilities, learning resources, or equipment.
 - Communication, professional conduct, or behaviour of staff/students.
 - Marketing, advertising, or information provided by external providers (third parties).

3.2 Guiding Principles: Fairness and Transparency

IOIS ensures all complaints are managed ethically, with natural justice, transparency, and timeliness, to effectively address concerns.

- **Natural Justice:** The complainant and the respondent (the party the complaint is made against) must be fully informed of the allegations against them and be provided with an opportunity to respond. No party will prejudge the facts, and all decisions will be based on evidence.
- **Confidentiality:** All complaints will be treated with confidentiality, and information will only be disclosed on a "need-to-know" basis to facilitate the investigation and resolution process.
- **Impartiality:** The person(s) handling the complaint investigation will be independent and not have had any prior direct involvement in the matter being complained about.
- **Timeliness:** All complaints will be processed efficiently, and IOIS commits to providing the complainant with regular updates regarding the progress of their complaint.

3.3 Complaint Resolution Process

IOIS provides two pathways for resolving grievances, ensuring accessibility and proportionality.

- **Informal Resolution:** Complaints should, where possible, be resolved immediately and informally by the staff member initially receiving the complaint (e.g., the RTO Manager or Student Support Officer). Informal resolution seeks a quick, mutually satisfactory outcome.
- **Formal Written Process:** Where an informal resolution is not possible, or the nature of the complaint is serious, the matter will proceed to a formal written investigation. A formal complaint must be documented, acknowledged, thoroughly investigated, and conclude with a formal written finding provided to the complainant.

3.4 Cost and Record-Keeping

- **Cost:** All complaints lodged and processed by IOIS will be handled at no cost to the student.

- Continuous Improvement: The complaints management system will function as a key mechanism for monitoring and evaluating IOIS's performance and is used to inform continuous improvement across all quality areas.
- Records: IOIS will maintain confidential records of all formal complaints, including the nature of the complaint, the evidence reviewed, the investigation findings, and the steps taken for resolution.

4. PROCEDURES

Step 1: Informal Resolution

- Wherever possible, complainants are encouraged to first attempt to resolve the issue informally with the person directly involved. This may include having a respectful conversation to clarify misunderstandings, raise concerns, and seek a mutually agreeable solution.
- If the complainant does not feel comfortable approaching the person involved, or if the issue is not resolved at this stage, they may seek assistance from the RTO Manager or an appropriate senior staff member who may facilitate an informal mediation.
- If the issue remains unresolved after informal discussions, or if the complainant prefers not to pursue informal resolution, the matter should proceed to the formal complaints process.

Step 2: Formal Complaint

- To lodge a formal complaint, the complainant must complete a Complaint Form, which is available from Student Support or the IOIS website.
- The Complaint Form must be submitted within **20 working days** of the incident or issue arising. Exceptions may be made where there are compassionate or compelling reasons for a delay in submission.
- The completed Complaint Form should be submitted to the Student Support Officer, who will ensure the complaint is logged and acknowledged.
- IOIS will provide a written acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint within **3 working days**. This acknowledgement will include confirmation that the complaint has been received, the name of the person managing the complaint, and an estimated timeframe for resolution.

Step 3: Investigation & Outcome

- The RTO Manager will commence an investigation within **5 working days** of receiving the formal complaint.
- The investigation will involve gathering relevant evidence, which may include:
 - written statements from the complainant and any other involved parties,
 - interviews with staff, students, or third parties,
 - review of records, policies, and other documentation relevant to the complaint.
- Throughout the process, principles of natural justice and procedural fairness will be applied. This means:
 - each party will have the opportunity to present their perspective,
 - decision-makers will remain impartial and unbiased, and

- decisions will be based on evidence, not assumptions.
- Once the investigation is completed, IOIS will provide the complainant with a written outcome within **20 working days**. This written notice will include:
 - a summary of the complaint,
 - the steps taken to investigate the complaint,
 - the findings of the investigation,
 - the decision made,
 - the reasons for the decision, and
 - information about how to access external options if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved within **20 working days**, the complainant will be advised in writing of the delay, the reasons for it, and provided with regular updates until the matter is finalised.

Step 4: External Options

If the complainant is not satisfied with IOIS's resolution, they may escalate the complaint to external agencies for independent review. These include:

- National Training Complaints Hotline – a national service that registers complaints related to vocational education and training.
 - Phone: 13 38 73 (Monday–Friday, 8am–6pm nationally).
- Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) – the national VET regulator. ASQA investigates issues relating to compliance with the Standards for RTOs and the National Code but does not resolve individual disputes.
 - Website: www.asqa.gov.au/complaints
- Overseas Students Ombudsman (OSO) – for international students. The OSO investigates complaints about problems that overseas students have with private education providers.
 - Website: www.ombudsman.gov.au

5. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT

The clear definition of roles and responsibilities ensures that all complaints are managed consistently, impartially, and with the necessary oversight, fulfilling Outcome Standard 4.2.

Role	Key Functions (Responsibilities)	Standards Link
Student Support Officer	1. Intake: Acts as the primary recipient for all incoming verbal or written complaints. 2. Assistance: Provides support to the complainant (especially students) in understanding the Complaints Policy and completing the formal IOIS Complaint Form. 3. Triage: Attempts to resolve minor issues immediately through informal resolution; escalates matters requiring formal investigation to the RTO Manager.	Outcome Standard 2.3 (Training support)

	4. Documentation: Logs the initial details of all complaints (informal and formal) in the Complaints Register.	
RTO Manager	1. Acknowledgment: Formally acknowledges the written complaint within the specified timeline. 2. Investigation: Oversees and/or conducts the formal investigation, gathering all relevant evidence from the complainant, the respondent, witnesses, and related records. 3. Determination: Makes a final, evidence-based determination on the complaint, ensuring all principles of natural justice are upheld. 4. Communication: Provides the complainant and respondent with the written statement of outcome, including the reasons for the decision and notification of the right to appeal (Standard 2.8). 5. Corrective Action: Initiates and monitors all required corrective and preventative actions resulting from the complaint findings.	Outcome Standard 4.2 (Roles and responsibilities)
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	1. Review: Reviews all formal complaints deemed to be of a serious nature or those that result in an appeal to ensure the investigation process followed due process and natural justice. 2. Sign-off: Provides final sign-off on the outcome of all formal complaints and any resulting high-level corrective actions that impact IOIS policy or governance. 3. Accountability: Ensures the Complaints Management System is operating effectively to maintain the organisation's integrity and supports the identification of systematic issues for continuous improvement (Standard 4.4).	Outcome Standard 4.1 (Leadership and accountability)
Academic Manager	1. Analysis: Regularly reviews anonymised complaints data (quarterly) to identify systemic risks or trends, particularly those related to training and assessment quality. 2. Improvement: Uses complaints data to inform and implement strategic changes to training practices, resources, and internal policies. 3. Support: Provides specialist support to the RTO Manager during investigations involving complex academic or assessment matters.	Outcome Standard 4.4 (Continuous improvement)

6. RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Complaint/Appeal Form
- Complaints & Appeals Register
- IOIS Student Handbook
- IOIS Assessment Policy
- IOIS Deferral, Suspension, Withdrawal & Cancellation Policy
- IOIS Continuous Improvement Policy

Document Version Control

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1.0	New document	July 2025