

Policy and Procedure- Complaints and Appeals

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PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to enable all students, including children and clients, the opportunity to express complaints they may have in relation to Australian College of Applied Animal Studies or education services provided by Australian College of Animal Studies.

To enable students, not in agreeance with assessment outcomes, the opportunity to appeal the assessment decision.

1. All Students participating in ACAAS services have the right to fair practice and a procedure through which complaints and appeals can be resolved equitably, in a dignified, unprejudiced and timely manner.
2. ACAAS strives to establish an atmosphere of trust and open communication so that any complaint or appeal is dealt with constructively. Students are assisted and supported to raise complaints and appeals without fear of retribution.
3. All complaints and appeals are treated seriously.
4. ACAAS encourages all parties to adopt an open view and to attempt to resolve problems through discussion and conciliation. All attempts will be made by ACAAS to resolve the complaint or appeal internally.
5. Where a complaint or appeal cannot be resolved through discussion and conciliation, ACAAS acknowledges the need for an appropriate external and independent agent to mediate between the parties. Students have the right to request an advocate to assist with the resolution of a complaint or appeal. This person will normally be an Accreditation Advisor. Alternately students are informed of external agencies who may assist with their complaint process.
6. The Student's consent must be obtained before any steps are taken to resolve a complaint or appeal. Due to the Privacy Act 2014, ACAAS are unable to act on any complaint or appeal unless the complainant gives us their expressed permission.
7. Any situation involving a breach of the law is referred to the appropriate agency and/or legal organisation.
8. ACAAS uses information obtained from complaints to improve our level of client service. As a result of complaints/appeals ACAAS will analyse the cause of the complaint/appeal, review its current processes and put into place systems, which can be used to identify the factors that cause adverse events. This process ensures that complaints continually improve the service ACAAS offers to its clients.

TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Complaint: When a Student, or another interested party, such as a Practical Placement Clinic, gives feedback about any aspect of the training received, OR when a Student believes they have been treated unfairly or differently by other participants or by an ACAAS staff.

Appeal: When a student lodges a formal or informal complaint regarding some aspect of the assessment process, or when the student lodges a formal/informal complaint about any other decision made by Australian College of Applied Animal Studies.

REFERENCE/ RELEVANT LEGISLATION

- AQTF Standard 2.7
- VRQA Guideline 2.7
- Privacy Act 2014
- Child Safe Standards- Standard 1.3, 2, 3.1, 4.2, 5.2, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3

PROCEDURAL STEPS

When a student has a complaint, they should first discuss the matter with the person concerned. If the student has concerns about raising the matter with this person, then they should discuss it with their Coordinator or Director of Training.

All students under 18, will be supported if they feel they need a parent or guardian to assist in communicating a complaint or concern.

ACAAS expects that, in most cases, the discussion of the concern or complaint will result in a prompt resolution of the matter which all parties will find acceptable. If this informal approach to the student's complaints does not lead to an acceptable resolution, then the student should pursue the more formal process for resolution of the matter as set out below.

All complaints, whether formal or informal, should be recorded in the complaints and feedback register, located in the server at T10.

The complaints and feedback register will be a standing agenda item at all staff meetings. Student confidentiality will be maintained through discussion and review of any complaints.

STAGE 1

Having first attempted resolution of the complaint through the informal processes, a student who believes that their complaint has not been adequately addressed is strongly advised to seek information and advice from their Coordinator, the Director of Training or the C.E.O. of ACAAS.

Having received the information and advice the student may then decide to:

- I. Take no further action, or
- II. Lodge a formal internal complaint
- III. Lodge a formal external complaint

STAGE 2 REGISTERING A COMPLAINT

- A. If the student or client decides to lodge a formal complaint, they must do so in writing to the C.E.O. of ACAAS.
Students under the age of 18, may choose to have a parent or guardian assist them in writing and lodging the complaint.
If the student under 18 years of age wants their parent or guardian informed of the complaint progress, this should be documented in the formal letter of complaint.

If the CEO is the subject of the complaint or is perceived to have a conflict of interest in relation to the matter, then the next most senior staff member must be approached (Director of Training or Compliance Officer).

- B. The student's written complaint will be forwarded to a staff member who will acknowledge receipt in writing within five working days and indicate when a resolution of the matter can be expected.

The staff member will independently review the complaint and attempt to find a resolution of the problem. If the staff member has, or perceives, there to be a conflict of interest in their handling of the complaint the staff member will refer the matter for investigation to a member of the senior executive team who is eligible and qualified to handle the matter, the student is to be notified of the referral of the complaint to another staff member.

If the staff member, communicating with the student, finds they are unable to resolve the complaint/appeal, a formal meeting between the ACAAS CEO, an appropriate staff member, the student and the student's nominated support person will be convened.
The Agenda for the meeting will be formulated by the ACAAS CEO and given to the student prior to the meeting to enable the student to gather evidence required to assist in the presentation of the complaint. The meeting will be recorded (with the permission of the student) and the ACAAS Compliance Officer or Director of Training will make supplementary notes. In a timely manner, the meeting notes will be prepared for the student and support person to review and sign.

The staff member investigating the complaint (with the support of the Compliance Officer) must keep (and file in the students file) formal records of the actions taken and notify the student in writing of the outcome of the complaint process and document the reasons that resolution was or was not achieved, as the case may be. This documentation must include the date when the complaint will be rectified.

A follow up process involves formal verbal communication with the student to ensure their complaint has been resolved.

ACAAS will review its policies and procedures related to the complaint and put in place a process to ensure that the basis for the complaint is resolved. (Continuous Improvement)

The student's enrolment and participation is not disrupted during this process

STAGE 3 EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS

Where the student remains dissatisfied with the result or conduct of ACAAS internal procedures for handling of a complaint, the student has the right to access an external appeals process. The student will have the right to have someone support them through this process. This may be a representative from the education advice service suppliers or other complaint handling bodies.

Students may access external support independently of ACAAS. ACAAS will assist in the organising and funding of this support if requested.

Students have a number of independent external sources where they can raise a complaint or appeal including:

Education advice services supplier

- RTO Intelligence www.rtointelligence.com.au

Other external complaint handling bodies

- VRQA* (<http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/complaints/tovrqa.htm>)
- Department of Fair Trading/ Consumer Affairs – Victoria
- Administrative Appeals Tribunal (<http://www.aat.gov.au>)

*The VRQA does not investigate complaints about occupational health and safety or wages and conditions. But the VRQA can investigate a complaint against an RTO. For more information on what the VRQA can investigate, please visit: <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/complaints/Pages/investigate.aspx>

If you are unhappy with the decision the VRQA has made about your complaint (including a decision not to investigate), you can request an internal review of the VRQA's handling of your complaint.

The Manager, Complaints Unit

VRQA, GPO Box 2317 Melbourne VIC 3001
Phone: (03) 9032 1554

Ombudsman Victoria

Phone: (03) 9613 6222, 1800 806 314 (regional)

National Training Hotline

Phone 13 38 73.

ACAAS will comply with any decisions made by an external arbitrator and act on recommendations for improvement made as part of the decision.

WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT

A student may withdraw a complaint at any time during the complaint resolution process and in this case the matter will be concluded and deemed to be resolved. If the original complaint was made in writing, then the withdrawal must also be in writing to the relevant staff member who is handling the matter at the time the withdrawal is being effected.

TIMELINES FOR COMPLAINT RESOLUTION

Stage/action	Responsible	Timeline
Stage 1 Making an informal complaint	Student	Approach a suitable staff member and discuss the complaint.
Stage 2 Making a formal internal complaint	Student	Write a letter of complaint to the CEO– see page 4 for template.
Acknowledgement of the receipt of the complaint and record in Complaints and Feedback Register- T10	Staff member	Within five working days of receipt of complaint
If the complaint needs to be investigated by senior executive staff, the student will be informed of this escalation. Alternately the student may request the escalation process.	Staff member	Within five working days of receipt of complaint
A formal meeting between the CEO, Class Coordinator, or other appropriate staff member (dependant on the nature of the complaint) and the complainant (with an appropriate “support person”) will be held to discuss the complaint and reach a mutually agreeable solution	CEO and complainant	Within 10 working days of the receipt of the complaint
Notification of the resolution	Staff member	Student will be notified in writing of the resolution in a timely manner. This time to resolution will be case dependant.

If the complaint cannot be solved internally or the student is not happy with the result.

Stage 3 – External formal complaint		
Outcome 1- the complaint will be reported to the external education advice service provider who will arbitrate the complaint on behalf of the student.	CEO of ACAAS and/ or student	Referral of the complaint to an external arbitrator on the request of the student. RTO Intelligence - 1300 833 424 www.rtointelligence.com.au
Outcome 2 – The student has the option to escalate the complaint to government bodies	Student	

CHILD SAFETY CONCERNS

Any staff member, student or child who has any concerns about any safety or wellbeing related to a child should immediately report this to the Director of Training (Child Safe Coordinator).

The staff member will be required to ensure any complaints in relation to Child Safety Concerns remain private and confidential.

Authorities such as Victoria Police, must be notified if there is an immediate concern to the child's wellbeing.

Child Protection and the Commission for Children and Young People should be notified if the complainant is not satisfied with ACAAS response to the complaint or they are concerned that the organisation may not be complying with the Child Safe Standards:

- by phone: 1300 78 29 78
- by email: contact@ccyp.vic.gov.au

If a staff member or complainant is unsure about how to report a concern, they should contact the commission or VRQA.

A staff member receiving a reportable complaint must notify the commission within 3 days.

<https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/report-an-allegation/>.

Any communication or directives provided by the commission or other relevant regulator will be followed.

ACAAS Code of Conduct and Child Safe Policy support the investigations and disciplinary actions that may need to be taken in the case of a complaint.

Dependent on the nature of a complaint, a staff member may:

- Have duties changed
- Be provided opportunity for retraining and professional development
- Be stood down from employment

Procedural fairness will be applied in any circumstance that requires disciplinary action.

Within the Appendix of this Policy is a "Four Critical Actions" poster, this should be followed in the instance of child safe reporting.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION/ ATTACHMENTS

Form/ Document/ Procedure	Location
Student Booklet – Complaints and appeals	aXcelerate
Any student complaint material – notes etc	Student files
Complaints and Appeals process	Given at Intro (Session 2)
Complaints and Appeals	Intro slides
Continuous Improvement register	Box- Continuous improvement
Complaints and Feedback Register	Box- T10
Staff meeting register	Box- S4
“Four critical actions”	G- H (& Appendix of policy)

VERSION CONTROL/ REVISION STATUS

VERSION	DATE	APPROVAL	AMENDMENT
2			Minor student complaint material to be stored in student file.
3	5-12-2014	Dr Julia Malcolm	Inclusion of external resolutions
4	8-12-2014	Liz Hoffmann	Inclusion of the students right to be represented at Formal Meeting – Stage 2 Non-disruption of enrolment and participation Payment for external process Enacting on the decision made by the independent person Link and root cause review
4	19/09/2016	Elise Chapman	Review only- no changes made
5	15/08/2017	Elise Chapman Cathy McAdie Nicole Pytellek De Johnson	Several minor changes made, terminology & sentence structure amended
6	19/12/2018	Anita Nikora Liz Hoffmann	Removed Vocational Pathways as an education advice service supplier Included telephone number for RTO Intelligence
7	16/03/2023	Elise Chapman	Updated to include Child Safe Standard information and complaints related to child safety and wellbeing. Addition of complaints and feedback register Complaints and feedback reviewed at staff meetings.
8	6 June 2024	Elise Chapman	Update template to new procedure template. Update “Supporting documents” table, to reflect staff meeting change. Update referenced standards/ legislation



APPENDIX



FourCriticalActions_ChildAbuse.pdf