

## Student Complaint and Grievance Policy and Procedure HEPP03

### PURPOSE

This policy and procedure describes the process for managing complaints and grievances raised by students.

### SCOPE

This policy and procedure applies to all students of Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education) and staff involved in the management of complaints and grievances. Matters raised may include the quality of the services, such as student support and teaching delivery. Other matters raised may include the following: perceived administration errors or disagreements, instances of bullying, harassment, discrimination or any other areas of perceived inappropriate, unfair or discriminatory treatment, action or decision.

This policy and procedure does not apply to academic issues such as outcomes of assessment, assignment of grades, instances of academic misconduct, occurrences of plagiarism or refusal (in full or in part) of an application for credit and recognition of prior learning.

### DEFINITIONS

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Appellant          | The person(s) lodging an appeal to the outcome of a complaint or grievance.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Complainant        | The person(s) lodging the complaint or grievance.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Complaint          | Written or verbal notification of dissatisfaction with any part of the services provided by Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education). A stage 1 complaint is usually of a minor matter and can be resolved at the local level, while a stage 2 complaint is a more formal matter that requires more formal processes. |
| National Code      | National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 established under the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000.                                                                                                                                                               |
| Grievance          | A complaint of a behaviour or action that is to be investigated using formal processes, that has been escalated from an unresolved stage 2 complaint.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Informal Complaint | An informal complaint is an issue raised by a student directly with the relevant staff member or unit, typically resolved without formal documentation.                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Formal Complaint   | A formal complaint is an issue submitted in writing through the official complaint form or process, requiring documented investigation and resolution by the Institute.                                                                                                                                                            |
| Respondent         | The person(s) against whom the complaint or grievance has been made.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| SCEI-HE            | Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

### POLICY

Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education) is committed to providing a supportive and transparent complaint and grievance process. Students are encouraged to resolve issues at the earliest stage possible.

The complaint process follows a three-stage pathway:

- Informal Stage – Direct discussion with the relevant staff member or unit to seek a resolution.
- Formal Stage – Submission of a formal written complaint for documented investigation and resolution.
- Appeal/External Stage – Escalation of unresolved complaints to internal appeal mechanisms or external authorities, as appropriate.

1. SCEI-HE is committed to providing effective, consistent, timely, fair, and confidential complaint and grievance handling processes for all students. For this reason, students are informed of the Complaint and Grievance Policy and Procedure throughout the enrolment process. The information is made available on the SCEI-HE website, at [Policies & Forms – Southern Cross Education Institute – Higher Education](#).
2. Any complaint or grievance of an alleged criminal nature will be reported to the police or other relevant authority.
3. Informal complaints should be acknowledged and, where possible, resolved within 5 working days of being raised, to

ensure timely support and to minimise disruption to students' studies.

4. SCEI-HE acknowledges that clear communication is vitally important particularly if issues arise between parties. To assist the communication process.
5. A student may escalate a complaint to a formal process at any stage.
6. General principles that apply to all stages of this policy and procedure and will be adhered to by the Institute are:
  - 6.1 All formal complaints must be reported in writing within 4 weeks of the adverse event occurring;
  - 6.2 The complainant and respondent will have the opportunity to present their case at each stage of the process;
  - 6.3 The complainant or respondent at any stage of the complaints and/or grievances process may seek the support of an independent third party;
  - 6.4 All complaints and grievances will be managed in a confidential manner without any retribution to either the complainant or the respondent;
  - 6.5 The complainant and respondent will not be discriminated against or victimised;
  - 6.6 At all stages, discussions relating to complaints and grievances will be recorded in writing. Full explanations for decisions and any action taken will be provided to the complainant or respondent if requested;
  - 6.7 All records relating to the complaint or grievance will be kept for a minimum of 5 years. Any records or documentation is to be kept strictly confidential and stored securely in the student's administration file and student management system; and
  - 6.8 Where complaints or grievances cannot be resolved internally, the Student will be referred to an appropriate external and independent body to review the case;
  - 6.9 Staff involved in complaint and grievance resolution will receive training in procedural fairness and cultural competency, and must act without bias;
  - 6.10 Students will be informed about their rights and support services during complaint processes, including access to interpreters or wellbeing staff if required.
  - 6.11 The Academic Board will receive anonymised annual reports on complaints and grievances, including trends and resolutions, to inform quality improvement measures.

## PROCEDURE

The complaint and grievance process follows a clear three-stage pathway: Informal → Formal → Appeal/External. Students are encouraged to seek a resolution at the earliest stage before progressing to the next stage.

### 1. Informal Complaint

- 1.1 Where appropriate, students should attempt to make reasonable endeavours to resolve a complaint or grievance informally before raising it as a formal complaint.
- 1.2 The complainant should approach the person involved, if appropriate. The complainant may seek support from a third party, such as a Student Welfare Officer, academic staff member, or a designated support person.
- 1.3 The most appropriate step for the complainant is to talk to the person who is the cause of the complaint or grievance about how their actions are impacting upon them (this depends on the nature of the complaint or grievance).
- 1.4 If the complaint is about behaviour, the complainant may choose to advise the other party that the conduct is inappropriate (for example, it may be offensive, intimidating, humiliating or hurtful) and ask for it not to continue.
- 1.5 If it is about Institute processes or a course matter, the complainant should describe to the other person the nature of the complaint and a possible resolution.
- 1.6 Should these steps fail to reach a resolution, the complainant may raise the complaint with their Course Coordinator (for academic issues) or Student Welfare Officer, who should provide advice and information on how to manage the situation.
- 1.7 If a resolution is reached, then the matter is finalised.
- 1.8 If the matter is not successfully resolved, the complainant may continue to the formal complaint process (Stage 1).

### 2. Formal Complaint

- 2.1 Formal complaints should be submitted in writing to Student Support, who will refer it to the Manager appropriate to the complaint. The delegated officer appointed to manage the complaint will be independent of the matter and will commence investigation within 5 working days of receiving the complaint. The notification of the complaint must provide a description of the complaint or grievance in

detail, including relevant information such as names, dates, venues, course details, and any supporting documentation, as per the Complaint and Grievance Form.

- 2.2 The complainant must also indicate what actions they have already taken to resolve the complaint or grievance and indicate the outcome they are seeking.
- 2.3 If a formal complaint lacks sufficient information, it may not be possible for the Institute to investigate.
- 2.4 Upon receipt of the formal complaint or grievance, a delegated officer will be appointed.
- 2.5 The delegated officer will investigate the complaint or grievance by:
  - 2.5.1 Validating the complaint;
  - 2.5.2 Verify the facts of the complaint;
  - 2.5.3 Obtain all the evidence related to the nature of the complaint, including policy and procedure;
  - 2.5.4 Conduct discussions and interviews with the relevant parties, e.g., complainant and respondent.
- 2.6 Following the investigation phase, the delegated officer will:
  - 2.6.1 Analyse all the evidence gathered;
  - 2.6.2 Formulate the findings;
  - 2.6.3 Determine the outcome and any recommendations, which may include:
    1. Counselling;
    2. Formal apology;
    3. Disciplinary action, e.g., warning.
- 2.7 Review of the Institute's policy and procedure.
- 2.8 The delegated officer will prepare a response of the investigation and outcome of the complaint for the Institute's records and provide it to the Manager and Academic Board.
- 2.9 The complainant will be advised in writing of the outcome of the complaint or grievance investigation including detailed reasons for the outcome, within 10 working days of the formal complaint or grievance being received.
- 2.10 The complainant will be advised of their right to access the appeals process if they are not satisfied with the outcome within 10 working days of the investigation concluding.

### 3. Appeals

- 3.1 All students have the right of appeal for a reversal, change or reconsideration of the decision where they are not satisfied with the decision.
- 3.2 Appeals must be submitted within 10 working days of the outcome received.
- 3.3 Upon receipt of an appeal, the Manager will arrange the appropriate SCEI-HE staff to:
  - 3.3.1 Register the appeal in the appeals register;
  - 3.3.2 Acknowledge receipt of the appeal in writing to the appellant within 2 working days of the appeal being received;
  - 3.3.3 Appeals will be reviewed by a staff member or panel not previously involved in the complaint and who is independent of the original decision-making process.
- 3.4 The reviewer will conduct all necessary consultations with the appellant and other relevant parties.
- 3.5 The appellant will be advised in writing of the outcome, including detailed reasons, within 10 working days.
- 3.6 If the appeals process results in a decision or recommendation in favour of the appellant, SCEI-HE will, within 24 hours, implement the decision or recommendation and/or take preventive or corrective action required by the decision or recommendation and advise the appellant of that action.
- 3.7 Once the internal appeals process has been exhausted, the student has a right to seek an external appeal from bodies such as:
  - 3.7.1 National Students Ombudsman [National Student Ombudsman \(NSO\)](http://www.nso.edu.au) ;
  - 3.7.2 The Administrative Review Tribunal (FEE-HELP) [Homepage | Administrative Review Tribunal](http://www.art.gov.au)
  - 3.7.3 The Resolution Institute's Expert Determination service  
<https://resolution.institute/Web/About-Us/About-Us-Landing-Page.aspx?hkey=5428825c-8ac6-460c-90eb-6020dc8fef9d>.
- 3.8 There is no cost to students for internal appeals. SCEI-HE will pay 50% of any financial expenses incurred to students from external appeals processes.

### RELATED DOCUMENTS

Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure HEPP02  
Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure HEPP05  
Student Code of Conduct HEPP07

Student Monitoring, Progress and Exclusion Policy and Procedure HEPP29

**LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT**

Age Discrimination Act 2004  
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)  
Disability Discrimination Act 1992  
Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000  
Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)  
Higher Education Support Act 2003  
National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018, Standard 10  
Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)  
Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)  
Protected Disclosure Act 2012 (Vic)  
Racial Discrimination Act 1975  
Sex Discrimination Act 1984

**RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Management**

- Promoting a culture that encourages the efficient, timely and effective management of all complaints and/or grievances.
- Publicising how and where complaints and grievances can be made.
- Ensuring confidentiality to all parties involved in the complaint and/or grievance.

**Delegated Officer**

- Conducting a thorough investigation into all formal complaints and grievances received.
- Communicating to relevant parties.
- Ensuring confidentiality.

**Students**

- Promptly attempt to resolve any complaints or grievances using an informal process.
- Cooperating with the formal reporting and investigation process of any complaints and/or grievances.
- Abide by the Student Charter and Student Conduct Policy.

**DOCUMENT AND RECORD CONTROL**

|                            |                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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