

SC4-I: Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedures

Purpose

This policy and associated procedures outline Aspen College's approach to managing complaints and appeals. This is to ensure that complaints are handled in a transparent way, as well as fairly, efficiently and effectively.

This policy and associated procedures meet the requirements of Standard 2.7 the Outcome Standards for RTOs, as well as Standard 10 of the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018.

Note that mechanisms for providing feedback is addressed in our Quality Assurance Policy and Associated Procedures.

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 Aspen College to be reviewed

DET means Department of Education and Training

Complaint means a person's formal expression of dissatisfaction with any product or service provided by Aspen College.

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

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

Policy statements

Approach

Complaints may be made against Aspen College, its trainers and assessors and other staff, a learner of Aspen College, as well as any third-party providing services on behalf of Aspen College including education agents.

Complaints can be in relation to any aspect of Aspen College's services provided.

Appeals can be made in respect of any decision made by Aspen College. An appeal is a request for Aspen College decision to be reviewed in relation to a matter, including assessment appeals.

In managing complaints, Aspen College will ensure that the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness are adopted at every stage of the complaint process. This means reviewing each complaint or appeal in an objective and consistent manner.

Aspen College will appoint relevant person/s to manage complaints and appeals.

The internal complaints and appeals process will be conducted at no cost to students.

Potential causes of complaints and appeals will be investigated, and corrective and preventative action will be taken in relation to complaint and appeals. Complaints and appeals will also be seen as an opportunity for improvement.

All individuals, including third parties will be informed of allegations made and will have the opportunity to present their case.

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.

Aspen College encourages complainants to first seek to address the issue informally by discussing it with the person involved. However, if the person is not comfortable with this or has tried this unsuccessfully, they are to follow the procedures below.

All records of complaints and appeals will be kept by Aspen College and entered into the complaints and appeals register.

Complaints and appeals process

Complaints and appeals are to be made as follows:

- Submit complaint or appeal in writing using the complaints and appeals form. The complaints and appeals form outline the information that should be provided.
- Submit complaint within 30 calendar days of the incident or in the case of an appeal within 30 calendar days of the decision being made.

Response to complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals will be responded to as follows:

- The complaint or appeal will be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days of receipt.
- Review of the complaint or appeal will commence within 5 working days of receiving the complaints.
- Complaints and appeals will be finalised as soon as practicable or within 30 calendar days.
- Where the complaint or appeal is complex and is expected to take more than 60 calendar days to process, Aspen College will write to inform the complainant or appellant of this including the reasons for such. Following this update, regular updates will be provided of progress.
- The outcomes of the complaints and appeals process will be communicated in writing to the person making the complaint or appeals. This will also include the reasons for the outcome.

Complaints and appeals handling

- Each individual involved in the complaint may have a support person of their choice present at any meetings to resolve the complaint or appeal.
- An independent assessor will be identified to conduct a review of an assessment decision that is being appealed.

Enrolment during a complaints process

Domestic students' enrolment will be maintained throughout the complaints and appeals process unless the complaint is in relation to misconduct.

International students' enrolment will also be maintained throughout the internal appeals processes without notifying DET via PRISMS of a change in enrolment status.

Additionally, for international students:

- if the appeal is against Aspen College'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 Aspen College's decision to report.
- if the appeal is against Aspen College's decision to defer, suspend or cancel a student's enrolment due to misbehaviour, Aspen College will notify DET via PRISMS of a change to the student's enrolment after the outcome of the internal appeals process.

Independent appeal process

Where the internal process has failed to resolve the complaint or appeal, the matter will be referred to an independent mediator.

For domestic students, all associated costs are to be met by the complainant/appellant unless it is Aspen College that made the decision to appoint the independent party.

The independent party recommended by Aspen College for cases involving domestic students is the Resolution Institute. However, another mediator of the student's choice can be appointed.

For international students, the external mediator is the Overseas Students Ombudsman (OSO). International students can access the OSO at no cost in relation to matters that cannot be resolved through internal processes. Further information and contact details are included below.

During the mediation process, Aspen College will cooperate in full and commits to immediately implement the decision or recommendation made by the external mediator and/or take preventative or corrective action required by the decision or recommendation.

All actions taken will be communicated in writing to students.

Information about external bodies to whom complaints can be made

Complaints can also be made to the organisations indicated below:

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. Access to the Hotline is through:

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 Aspen College's registering body, Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). It is important to understand that ASQA does not act as an advocate for individual students and is not responsible for resolving disputes between students and training providers. ASQA only uses information from all complaints as intelligence to inform regulatory activities. More information can be found at:

<https://www.asqa.gov.au/complaints>

THE OVERSEAS STUDENT OMBUDSMAN (OSO):

International students may complain to the OSO about a range of circumstances including:

- being refused admission to a course;
- course fees and refunds;
- being refused a course transfer;
- course progress or attendance;
- cancellation of enrolment;
- accommodation or work arranged by Aspen College;
- incorrect advice given by an education agent;
- taking too long in certain processes such as issuing results; and/or
- not delivering the services indicated in the Offer Letter and Student Agreement.

More information can be found at:

<https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/complaints/international-student-complaints>

Procedures

1. Process complaints and appeals

- 1.1 File the complaints and appeals form received.
- 1.2 Send out an acknowledgement within 3 working days of receiving the complaint or appeal.
- 1.3 Record details of the complaint or appeal on receipt on the complaints and appeals register.
- 1.4 Determine whether the complaint or appeal can be resolved quickly and easily. If so, take immediate action to resolve the complaint or appeal and inform the student in writing of the outcome.
- 1.5 If the complaint is more complex, organise relevant staff to review the complaint and commence investigation.
- 1.6 Inform the complainant or appellant within 5 days of receiving the complaint that the investigation will commence or of the action that will occur in the case of simple complaints.
- 1.7 Conduct an investigation that includes:
 - checking of all facts and accuracy of information
 - requesting further information as required
 - organising a meeting with the complainant/appellant
 - identifying relevant corrective/preventative action
 - confirming a solution.
- 1.8 Where the matter is an appeal about an assessment decision, the investigation process will include an independent review of the assessment evidence and decision by another assessor. A relevant independent assessor should be organised.
- 1.9 The investigation will be completed within 30 days, or if it is considered that it will take longer to than 60 calendar days to process, Aspen College will write to inform the complainant or appellant of this including the reasons for such. Following this update, regular updates will be provided of progress.
- 1.10 Where the process finds in favour of the student, organise a management meeting to discuss:
 - the process and its outcome; and
 - actions to be taken to implement the decision, including both corrective/preventative actions.
- 1.11 Following the meeting, agreed actions will be immediately implemented.
- 1.12 Update the complaints and appeals register.
- 1.13 Once the investigation is complete, the complainant or appellant will be informed in writing of the outcome. Where the response is in relation to a complaint, the letter will advise that the internal appeals process may also be accessed.
- 1.14 Archive the complaint or appeal documentation.

2. Organise external appeals

- 2.1 In cases where the student has organised the mediator, it will be responding to the mediator's requests.
- 2.2 Cooperate with all requirements of the mediator, providing all information as required.
- 2.3 Where the mediator finds in favour of the student, organise a management meeting to discuss:
- the external process and its outcome; and
 - actions to be taken to implement the decision, including both corrective/preventative actions.
- 2.4 Following the meeting, agreed actions will be immediately implemented.
- 2.5 Advise the student of the action that Aspen College will take in response to the external mediator's decision.
- 2.6 Where the external mediator support Aspen College's decisions regarding international students, for example, in relation to cancellation, notify DET via PRISMS.

Responsibilities

The CEO is responsible for:

- investigating complaints and appeals
- making decisions about complaints and appeals in conjunction with others.

The Campus Managers are responsible for:

- investigating complaints and appeals
- making decisions about complaints and appeals in conjunction with others
- facilitating external decisions.

The Administration and Student Support Officer is responsible for:

- processing complaints and appeals forms
- filing all documentation.