

Student Complaints Procedure

Policy Code: CG1091

Table of Contents

Purpose	1
Scope	1
Legislative context	2
Definitions	2
Actions	3
Student Grievance Officers	3
Support person	3
Right to an advocate	3
Support Services	3
Confidentiality	3
Anonymous Complaints	4
Good Faith	4
Fairness and no retribution	4
Informal self-managed resolution	4
Timeliness	4
Making a Complaint	4
Complaint Levels	5
Level 1 complaint	5
Level 2 complaint (School or Partner Provider)	6
Level 3 complaint (University)	6
External Review	7
Review and Improvement	7
Supporting documents	7
Responsibility	8
Promulgation	8
Implementation	8
Records Management	8

Purpose

This procedure outlines how student concerns and complaints are handled at Federation University.

The University aims to resolve student complaints and concerns in a transparent, consistent, fair and timely manner.

Feedback received through the complaint process provides Federation University with valuable insights, allowing the University to make improvements and improve the student experience.

Scope

This procedure applies to complaints made by students of the University, including students studying with partner providers.

All staff when handling student concerns or complaints must comply with this procedure.

This procedure does not apply to decisions under University statute or regulation, University appeals or where another specific policy applies.

Legislative context

- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015
- Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015
- National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018
- Australian Quality and Training Framework Standards.
- Victorian Regulations and Qualifications Authority Guidelines [to Minimum Standards 2016](#)
- Victorian [Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012](#).

Definitions

Term	Definition
Complaint	A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with an aspect of a student's experience with the University or the University environment. A complaint may be made about a partner provider, contractor or agent.
Investigator	Means a person independent of the persons involved in the complaint and who is appointed to investigate the facts of the complaint. The investigator may be internal or external to the University.
Mediation	Means an informal dispute resolution process, where the student and the University attempt to reach an agreed resolution with the assistance of an independent person. The independent person may be internal or external to the University.
Natural Justice	Means general procedural fairness in the handling of a complaint and includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • giving a person who may be affected by a decision a reasonable opportunity to respond; • the right to attend meetings with a support person, if required (the support person may be internal or external to the University and should not hold a legal qualification); • the right to a fair and unbiased process for all parties involved; • genuine consideration by the decision-maker of any submissions made; • genuine inquiry into any areas of dispute; • the right to an independent, unbiased decision-maker; and • a final decision that is based solely on the relevant evidence.
Partner Provider	Means a third party provider, located either onshore or offshore, who has entered into an agreement with the University to deliver all or part of a course or program to students.
Staff	Includes any person who has an employment contract with the University on a full-time, part-time, sessional or casual basis, or those employed through a contract for services.
Student	Means a person enrolled or admitted as a student of the University.

Term	Definition
Student Grievance Officers	Student Grievance Officers are designated persons within each school or partner provider with responsibility for assisting in the informal resolution of complaints.
Student Integrity Office	The office responsible for the student complaint processes and administering the online complaints portal. The Student Integrity Office can be contacted at Student.Integrity@federation.edu.au
University Grievance Officer	This role is held by the Associate Director, Risk and Integrity. The University Grievance Officer can be contacted at grievanceofficer@federation.edu.au .

Actions

Student Grievance Officers

Student Grievance Officers assist students to resolve their complaints in an informal way and at the earliest possible opportunity under this procedure. Student Grievance Officers will actively seek the advice of the Student Integrity Office and the Manager, Equity and Equal Opportunity, where appropriate. Refer [here](#) for a full listing of available Student Grievance Officers.

Support person

All students have the right to a support person during any stage of the complaints process. The support person may be internal or external to the University and should not hold a legal qualification. A support person is an observer and may not speak unless invited to do so by the person responsible for conducting the relevant meeting or discussion.

Right to an advocate

A student enrolled as an international student, and a domestic student whose capacity for self- advocacy is impaired because of disability, have the right to a non-legally trained advocate of their choice to represent them during the complaints process.

Support Services

- [Student Advisory Service](#) can support you during the complaints process and help you to navigate your way around University legislation, policies and procedures.
- [Counselling Services](#) provide free and confidential counselling in a supportive and welcoming environment.
- [Disability and Learning Access Unit](#) provides services to students with a disability.
- The University's [Safer Campuses website](#) includes information on personal safety.

Confidentiality

All persons involved in the complaint process must maintain confidentiality and only discuss the complaint with persons who need to know in order to assist in the resolution of the concern. This responsibility extends to the student making the complaint. Failure to maintain confidentiality can result in disciplinary action.

Public interest disclosures, including complaints about the improper or corrupt conduct of University officers (within the meaning of the *Protected Disclosures Act 2012*), must be made to the [Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission \(IBAC\)](#). Further information regarding public interest disclosures can be found in the University's [Public Interest Disclosures Procedure](#).

Anonymous Complaints

If a student submits a complaint anonymously, the University may be limited in the actions it can take to resolve the concern. If the student does not provide contact information, the University may not be able to respond to them.

Good Faith

Complaints must be submitted in good faith and include all relevant facts to assist the University to resolve the concern. The University is committing to making a genuine attempt to resolve complaints. Inappropriate language and behaviours, or misuse of the complaints process, can lead to disciplinary action.

Fairness and no retribution

The University applies this procedure in a consistent and fair manner. The University will not tolerate retribution or victimisation towards an individual that raises a concern or complaint in good faith.

Informal self-managed resolution

Before making a complaint, a student is expected to try and resolve the concern directly with the person or area involved (if it is reasonable and appropriate to do so). To do this, they should contact the relevant person and arrange a time to discuss. This may be the course coordinator, program coordinator or academic coordinator in the first instance.

The Student Advisory Service can help assist students to clarify their issue, prepare for a meeting and/or provide support at a meeting.

Timeliness

Students should take steps to address concerns as soon as possible. While the University does not set a time limit for the making of a complaint, the complaint must relate to issues from the student's time with the University. As time passes complaints can become more difficult to resolve.

Making a Complaint

Students may approach the relevant staff member within their School and attempt to resolve the concern at a local level.

If a student is unable to resolve a matter they may submit an [online complaint](#). Upon submitting an online complaint, the student will receive an automated email confirming receipt.

When making a complaint the student must provide in writing:

- details of the student's concern;

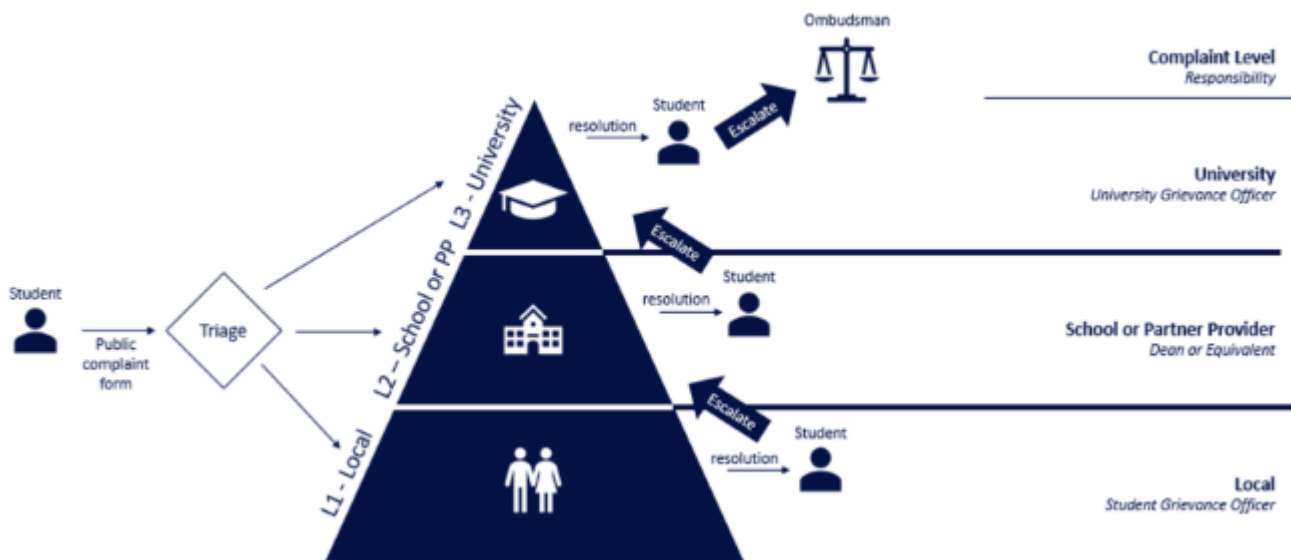
- what steps the student has taken to attempt to resolve the concern;
- the student's preferred outcome; and
- relevant documents/attachments.

The University may in its discretion dismiss a complaint if the complaint is not submitted in good faith, misguided, frivolous, malicious or vexatious.

Complaint Levels

Complaints are categorised into three levels. The levels and escalation paths are displayed in the figure below:

- Level 1 complaint (Local or Student Grievance Officer)
- Level 2 complaint (School or Partner Provider)
- Level 3 complaint (University)



Complaints will follow the above stages until they are resolved or all stages have been exhausted.

Level 1 complaint

Within 5 working days' of the receipt of a complaint, the Student Integrity Office or [Student Grievance Officer](#) will email the student to confirm:

- whether the subject matter of the complaint will be considered under the [Student Complaints Policy](#);
- if so, the member of staff that the complaint has been assigned to. If the subject matter of the complaint falls outside the [Student Complaints Policy](#) the concern will be redirected to the appropriate area of the University; and
- the level of the complaint process that applies and a copy of this procedure (or an email link to it).

The Student Grievance Officer will attempt to resolve the complaint with the student. The Student Grievance Officer may take such steps that they believe may assist in resolving the concern. The steps may include:

- meeting or talking with the student or other persons involved in the complaint;

- gathering information relevant to the complaint;
- referring the complaint to an appropriate staff member that can assist to resolve the complaint;
- referring the student to support services (e.g. counselling, student advisory services); and
- consulting with subject matter experts (e.g. Manager Equity and Diversity).

Within 20 working days' of receiving the complaint, the Student Grievance Officer will notify the student by email of the outcome and actions that have been agreed. This timeframe may only be extended with the consent of the student.

If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome they may choose to escalate their complaint to Level 2 by emailing Student.Integrity@federation.edu.au. The Student Grievance Officer's outcome email will advise the student of the right to escalate the complaint to Level 2 under this procedure.

Level 2 complaint (School or Partner Provider)

A Level 2 complaint is received when a complaint escalates from Level 1 or the Student Integrity Office determines that a complaint should be handled at the School or Partner Provider level in the first instance.

Within 5 working days of receipt of a Level 2 complaint, the Student Integrity Office will email the student to confirm the person to whom the complaint has been referred for resolution (Dean or equivalent).

The Dean or nominee will attempt to resolve the complaint with the student. The Dean or nominee may take such steps that they believe may assist in resolving the concern. The steps may include:

- meeting or talking with the student or other persons involved in the complaint;
- gathering information relevant to the complaint;
- referring the complaint to an appropriate staff member that can assist to resolve the complaint;
- referring the student to support services (e.g. counselling, student advisory services); and
- consulting with subject matter experts (e.g. Manager Equity and Diversity).

Within 20 working days' of the Level 2 complaint being received, the Dean or nominee will notify the student by email of the outcome and actions that have been agreed. This timeframe may only be extended with the consent of the student.

If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome they may choose to escalate their complaint to Level 3 by emailing Student.Integrity@federation.edu.au. The Dean's or nominee's outcome email will advise the student of the right to escalate the complaint to Level 3 under this procedure.

Level 3 complaint (University)

A Level 3 complaint is received when a complaint escalates from Level 2 or the University Grievance Officer determines that, due to the nature of the complaint, the complaint should be handled at University level in the first instance.

If the University Grievance Officer is of the opinion that mediation (or another form of alternative dispute resolution) may assist in the resolution of the complaint, the University Grievance Officer may put this option to the student for consideration as an alternative to investigation. The student must consent for an alternative process be used and the time frames that will apply.

Within 5 working days' of receipt of a Level 3 complaint, the University Grievance Officer will email the student to confirm the name and title of the senior staff member appointed to determine the complaint. A senior staff member is the Vice Chancellor or a member of the Vice Chancellor's Senior Team for the purposes of this procedure.

Within 10 working days' of receipt of a Level 3 complaint, the senior staff member must, on the recommendation of the University Grievance Officer, appoint an investigator to assess the facts that relate to the complaint. The investigator may be either internal or external to the University.

As part of the investigation process, the investigator will:

- speak with the student and any other persons they consider relevant to the complaint;
- gather information and documents related to the complaint;
- seek any further information that they consider necessary;
- conduct the investigation in accordance with the principles of natural justice;
- make factual findings on matters relevant to the complaint; and
- recommend to the senior staff member appropriate action to be taken by the University (if required).

Within 15 working days' of appointment the investigator must conduct the investigation process and provide a report to the senior staff member for consideration. The senior staff member will consider the report and will determine an outcome at their discretion. The senior staff member will by email notify the student of the outcome, the reasons for the decision and any steps that will be taken.

The senior staff member's decision is the final step in the student complaint process and is not open to challenge through any other dispute resolution mechanism within the University.

External Review

Complaints about the administrative actions and decisions of the University can be made to the Victorian Ombudsman. Refer to the [Ombudsman Victoria](#) website for further information. Students studying in another State may make a complaint to the equivalent office in that State. The relevant Ombudsman in each state can be found by clicking on the below links:

- [NSW](#)
- [QLD](#)
- [SA](#)

The Ombudsman is generally the office of last resort. If you have not followed the steps laid down in the relevant University procedures, the Ombudsman may ask you to do so before accepting your complaint.

Students may also access other external organisations such as the [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](#) and the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#).

Review and Improvement

Monitoring, reporting and review will occur with the purpose of reducing complaint instance rates and addressing underlying causes. Regular reporting will assist with the identification of recurring complaints or systematic issues.

The University Grievance Officer will generate de-identified reports from student complaint data for consideration by senior staff and the Vice Chancellor's Senior Team for this purpose.

Supporting documents

- [Student Complaints Policy](#).
- Sexual Harm Policy
- Sexual Harm Procedure

- [Discriminatory and Sexual Discriminatory and Sexual Harassment Complaint Procedure](#)
- [Public Interest Disclosure Procedure](#)

Responsibility

- The Vice Chancellor's Senior Team reports and provides assurance to the University Council that student complaints are being monitored and appropriate steps are being taken to address underlying causes.
- The Chief Operating Officer (as Approval Authority), is responsible for approving and overseeing the implementation of this procedure.
- The Director Corporate Governance (as Policy Sponsor), through the University Grievance Officer and Student Integrity Office, is responsible for reviewing and implementing this policy.
- The University Grievance Officer and the Student Integrity Office is responsible for the effective processing and reporting of student complaints.

Promulgation

This procedure will be communicated by:

1. A FedNews announcement and on the 'Recently Approved Documents' page on the University's Policy Central website;
2. Distribution of e-mail communication to the Vice Chancellor's Senior Team / Deans or equivalent / Directors or equivalent / staff and corresponding roles within partner providers.

Implementation

This procedure will be implemented throughout the University via:

1. A FedNews announcement and on the 'Recently Approved Documents' page on the University's Policy Central website
2. Staff training sessions

Records Management

Complaint records are held in the central complaints management system, the integrity of which is to be maintained by the Student Grievance Officers, Student Integrity Office and University Grievance Officer in accordance with the Public Record's Office requirements.