

1 Overview

The purpose of this document is to describe the policy and procedure for handling grievances and appeals within the organisation. Grievances can be appeals, concerns, problems, issues or complaints.

EQUALS International (Aust) Pty Ltd (EQUALS) is committed to maintaining and implementing an effective, timely, fair and equitable grievance handling system which is easily accessible to all students.

EQUALS aims to:

- develop a culture that views grievances as an opportunity to improve EQUALS and how we work
- implement a grievance handling system that is student focussed and helps EQUALS to prevent grievances from recurring
- ensure that any grievances are resolved promptly, objectively, with sensitivity and in complete confidentiality
- ensure that the views of each complainant and respondent are respected and that any party to a grievance is not discriminated against nor victimised; and
- ensure that there is a consistent response to grievances.

A grievance can be defined as a student's expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of EQUALS' services and activities, including both academic and non-academic matters, such as:

- the enrolment, induction/orientation process
- the quality of education provided
- academic issues, including student progress, assessment, curriculum and awards in a course of study
- handling of personal information and access to personal records; and
- the way someone has been treated (refer to the Document Map at the end of this document for further information on relevant legislation).

EQUALS' grievance procedures are designed to ensure that EQUALS responds effectively to individual cases of dissatisfaction.

Students are entitled to access the grievance procedures set out in this policy regardless of the location of the campus of EQUALS at which the grievance has arisen, the mode in which they study or their place of residence.

2 Policy

The Grievance Handling Procedure has been established to ensure that academic and non-academic student concerns are treated in a transparent, timely and just matter. EQUALS ensures that students have access to a fair and equitable process for dealing with grievances and provides an avenue for students to appeal against decisions that affect their progress.

This policy and procedure is for Academic and Non-Academic student matters and outlines the handling of grievances and appeals that is easily accessible to students, including those who are or would be entitled to VET Student Loans assistance.

EQUALS will respond to any complaint or appeal the student makes regarding EQUALS, EQUALS' education agents or any related third party.

2.1 Principles

For the purposes of this policy, EQUALS is guided by the following principles:

- grievance and review procedures will be readily available to ensure that staff and students understand their rights and responsibilities, including their right to have a support person present at any interview or proceeding
- every opportunity will be provided to resolve grievances informally and quickly through mediation and discussion
- parties to the grievance resolution process will not be disadvantaged as a result of lodging or investigating the grievance, or responding to the grievance
- the principles of mutual respect, confidentiality and procedural fairness will be observed by all parties to the complaint resolution process
- grievances and appeals will be resolved promptly
- grievance and review procedures will be applied consistently and transparently
- a student's enrolment will be maintained while the grievance process is ongoing
- the grievance and review process will be well documented, and the results will be communicated to relevant parties in a timely manner
- formal complaints and internal reviews are without charge to the student
- students will be provided with a written statement of the outcome of any formal grievance, including full details of the reasons for the outcome; and
- the grievance resolution process will be used by EQUALS to identify areas for improvement in the quality of services and support it provides to students.

3 Important Information: Collecting feedback

Students are regularly provided with the opportunity to provide feedback that enables them to express any concerns they may have encountered with EQUALS in relation to academic and non-academic matters. Feedback is encouraged at any stage and common feedback collection tools include:

- student evaluation of learning and teaching (surveys sent by electronic form or hard copy)
- feedback form on the EQUALS' website; and
- feedback from phone surveys.

Where students have identified a rating below satisfactory or have made specific comments concerning their dissatisfaction, and where the student has identified themselves, the student is contacted for further discussion.

4 Record Keeping & Confidentiality

A written record of formal grievances handled under this procedure and their outcomes shall be maintained for a period of time. Access to these records may be available upon written request to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). These records will be maintained in the student's communication record and/or Grievance Register. Records relating to grievances and appeals will be treated as confidential and will be covered by the EQUALS' [Privacy and Personal Information Procedures](#).

- 4.1 The CEO must provide quarterly summative reports on all student complaints and grievances to the Board of Directors.
- 4.2 The Academic Director must provide quarterly summative reports on academic grievances to the Academic Board.

5 International students

It is important to consider the duration of an international student's stay in Australia (as outlined in Standard 10 of the [National Code](#)). Every effort must be made to ensure the safety, security, quality-learning environment, emotional and physical health of the student and appreciation given for their circumstances whilst away from home. The nominated staff member will assist the student on an individual needs basis. 24-hour support is available for students. Note: Internationals students are not eligible to access VET Student Loans Assistance.

6 Recording & Actioning Student Grievances and Appeals

Grievances that the student does not wish to formalise in writing may be recorded in the Grievance Register and the Chief Executive Officer notified (where applicable).

The outcome of formal grievances and appeals are recorded in the Grievance Register.

Where grievances or appeals result in a decision that supports the student's grievance, EQUALS will implement corrective and/or preventative action and advise the student of the outcome. This will be done within 30 days of the result.

VET School based students only: For students under the age of 18, a copy of their outcome will be sent to their parent, legal guardian or other nominated care giver (as applicable).

7 Publication

This Policy and Procedure was ratified and approved by the governing body and authority, detailed in the Document Map (section 11) below.

For the purposes of communicating to students, this Policy and Procedure will form part of the induction/orientation process and will be published on the EQUALS website (www.equals.edu.au)

For the purposes of communicating to and training staff, this Policy and Procedure will form part of the induction process and will be published in the EQUALS Quality Framework.

8 Procedure

This procedure:

- includes the provision for appeal through an independent internal investigation of grievances which remain unresolved
- includes the provision for external review of decisions made following any internal investigation
- includes consideration of any recommendations arising from the external review
- ensures that complainants or respondents are not victimised or discriminated against; and
- will be complete, unambiguous and agreed to and ratified by EQUALS.

This procedure does not apply in instances where a grievance or appeal received from a student relates to behavior which is illegal, harmful to the complainant or others, or where EQUALS or the wider community is at risk.

Once a grievance and/or appeal is lodged in accordance with this policy, assessment of it will commence within 10 working days.

Grievance Handling Policy and Procedure (Academic and Non-Academic)

8.1 Step one – informal grievance

- 8.1.1 Students are encouraged to resolved grievances informally in the first instance, if at all possible. However, this is not a requirement.
- 8.1.2 Grievances should be resolved informally within 10 working days whenever possible through discussion between the complainant and the person directly responsible for the decision or behaviour that is the subject of the student's grievance. The grievances should be raised promptly via email, phone or direct conversation. It is the responsibility of both parties to explore options for resolving the issue as soon as possible after it has been raised and to do so in a courteous and respectful manner.

It is acknowledged that in some circumstances, students may not feel comfortable raising their grievance directly with the person who is the subject of the grievance. Advice on resolving a grievance informally is available from the following individuals:

Academic Matters

Academic Manager (VET)
Academic Director (Higher Education)

Non-Academic Matters

Chief Operating Officer

There is no requirement to resolve grievances informally. Students have the option of requesting a formal review as the first step in the grievance resolution process.

Whenever possible, informal grievances will be resolved within 10 working days. There are no fees for lodging informal grievances.

8.2 Step two - formal grievance

- 8.2.1 If the issue cannot be resolved informally, or if the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the informal grievance, a formal review of their grievance should be lodged using the [Formal Grievance Form](#) (Form). The Form must be clear, detailed and complete. There is no cost to the student for utilising the formal grievance process.
- 8.2.2 The Form will be reviewed by the appropriate member of the Executive Management Team.
- 8.2.3 Once a grievance and/or appeal is lodged, the appropriate member will contact the student within 10 working days to further consult on the issue.
- 8.2.4 An independent and impartial senior staff member who is nominated by EQUALS discusses the grievance with the individual. The outcome may be recorded on the central improvement register or in the student's file, or otherwise as required. Students may obtain a copy of the grievance record by requesting a copy from EQUALS.
- 8.2.5 EQUALS will endeavor to resolve the formal grievance within 20 working days of the date it is lodged. If that is not possible, EQUALS will notify the student and provide a new time frame.
- 8.2.6 A written response will be issued to the student lodging the grievance, informing them of the outcome (together with reasons) and any other relevant information including their right to access the internal appeals process if they are not satisfied with the outcome of their formal grievance. The written response will be provided within 10 working days of the discussion referred to in clause 8.2.4 above.

8.3 Step three - internal appeal

- 8.3.1 Where a student is dissatisfied with a decision or action made by EQUALS, the student may appeal the decision/action within 20 working days. Students may lodge an appeal in writing addressed to the Board of Directors (Non-Academic grievances) or the Academic Board (Academic grievances), GPO Box 2443 Adelaide SA 5001. There is no cost to the student for utilising the internal appeal process.
- 8.3.2 EQUALS will endeavor to resolve an internal appeal within 20 working days of the date it is lodged. If that is not possible, EQUALS will notify the student and provide a new time frame.
- 8.3.3 EQUALS will notify a student in writing of the outcome of the internal appeal (giving reasons) within 10 working days of any meeting with the student conducted as part of the appeal or, if no meeting, on or before the expiry of the time period set out in clause 8.3.2 above.

8.4 Step four - external appeal

- 8.4.1 If the issue is unable to be resolved within the organisation, then the student has the right to escalate the issue to an external body (independent body) who will review the issue and will be advised of this right within 10 working days of the conclusion of the internal appeals process. An external appeal or request for a review by an external grievance handling process must be lodged with the relevant external body within 10 working days of the decision and outcome. In most cases, the purpose of an external appeals process is to consider whether EQUALS has followed its policies and procedures, rather than make a decision in place of EQUALS.
- 8.4.2 EQUALS recommends that students contact one of the following organisations:

Higher Education (Domestic & International) students:

Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA)
Suite 612, Level 6
198 Harbour Esplanade
Docklands VIC 3008
Ph: (03) 9642 5212
<https://ihea.edu.au>
Email: info@ihea.edu.au

IHEA is positioned to respond to and resolve all manner of student grievances (once internal dispute resolution processes have been exhausted).

VET (Domestic & International) students:

Office of the Training Advocate
Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and
Training Toll Free: 1800 006 488
www.trainingadvocate.sa.gov.au

Australian Skills Quality Authority
Website: <http://www.asqa.gov.au/complaints/complaints.html>

Higher Education & VET (International students) only:

The Overseas Students Ombudsman offers a free and independent service for international students who have a grievance or want to lodge an external appeal about a decision made by their education provider. The Overseas Students Ombudsman investigates complaints relating to administrative actions or decisions made by a education provider and the related processes, but not about broader

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educational quality issues. Refer to the Overseas Students Ombudsman website www.oso.gov.au or phone 1300 362 072 for more information.

EQUALS agrees to be bound by any recommendations from the Overseas Students Ombudsman and the CEO will ensure that any recommendations made are implemented immediately upon receipt of such recommendations.

- 8.4.3 These services are free to the complainant and/or respondent. Complainants and/or respondents are welcome to be accompanied and assisted by support person (e.g. a friend, advocate, mentor/buddy) at the time of discussing a grievance or dispute. Both EQUALS and the above organisations are committed to the prompt resolution of grievances/disputes, particularly in consideration of the limited stay of an international student in Australia.

8.5 Further Action for Grievances and Appeals regarding VET Student Loans and Fee-Help

For eligible domestic students only

If a grievance/appeal still remains unresolved after the external appeal, the student may decide to refer the matter to the Skilling Australia Hotline 13 38 73.

9 Definitions

(Terms not defined in this document may be in the [EQUALS Glossary](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/home?lx=GCzY7kacE2GweBYJA3450Q) <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/home?lx=GCzY7kacE2GweBYJA3450Q>)

Appeal: An appeal is an application by a student for reconsideration of an unfavorable decision or finding during training and/or assessment. An appeal must be made in writing and specify the particulars of the decision or finding in dispute. Appeals must be lodged within 20 working days of the decision or finding is informed to the student.

The policy applies regardless of the location of the campus at which the grievance has arisen, the student's place of residence or the mode in which they study.

Grievance: Also known as Complaint. Academic student concerns may include the provision of training and assessment within a course of study, including quality of learning and teaching, classroom issues, availability and standard of instructional resources, course content, student progress, scheduling, training facilities and discrimination.

Non-academic student concerns may relate to the provision of admission and support services such as those associated with the enrolment process, finance functions, professional experience assistance, the handling of personal information and access to personal records.

Student: means both students and potential students, enrolled, or seeking to enroll in a course of study.

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10 Approval and Amendment History

| Version | Approved by | Approval Date | Details |
|---------|--------------------|---------------|--|
| | CEO | 07/2013 | Refer archived policy. |
| 1.0 | Board of Directors | 29/09/2016 | Updated scope and terminology. |
| 2.0 | Board of Directors | 18/07/2017 | Policy review. Updates throughout, inclusion of comprehensive document map and integration of previous VET specific Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure (version 1.17) with higher education Grievance Handling Policy and Procedure (version 1.0). Change of name to 'Grievance Handling Policy and Procedure (Academic and Non-Academic)'. |
| 2.1 | EMC | 28/10/2018 | Minor formatting and grammar edits, inclusion of Formal Grievance Form (webform). |
| 2.2 | EMC | 11/11/2018 | Minor improvements to clarify procedure. |
| 2.3 | EMC | 14/02/2019 | Insertion of 'external appeal' in heading 8.4, additional related documents and/or registers. |
| 2.4 | EMC | 01/06/2019 | Minor amendments to 8.2, 8.3, 8.4.2. Inclusion of 4.1 and 4.2. |
| 2.5 | EMC | 09/11/2019 | Minor amendments and inclusions to 2, 8, 8.2.3, and 8.4.2. |

11 Document Map

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| Approval Authority: | Board of Directors | Advisory Committee for Approval Authority | Executive Management Committee |
| Authorised By: | CEO | | |
| Effective from: | 18/07/2017 | | |
| Next Review Date: | 18/07/2020 | | |
| File Location: | The current version of this policy can be accessed from the Policy Register (internal users only) | | |
| Relevant Legislation: | Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA) Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 Standards for RTO's 2015 Privacy Act (1988) Work Health & Safety Act 2012 (SA) | | |
| Related Documents and/or Registers: | Governance and Quality Assurance Framework Formal Grievance Form Grievance Register International Student Prospectus Student Handbook Privacy and Personal Information Procedures P-0433 Process for Notification following Appeal(s) | | |
| Policy Subdivision | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Corporate or Academic Governance <input type="checkbox"/> Academic Management <input type="checkbox"/> Operational Management | | |
| Administrator: | Quality Administrator | | |