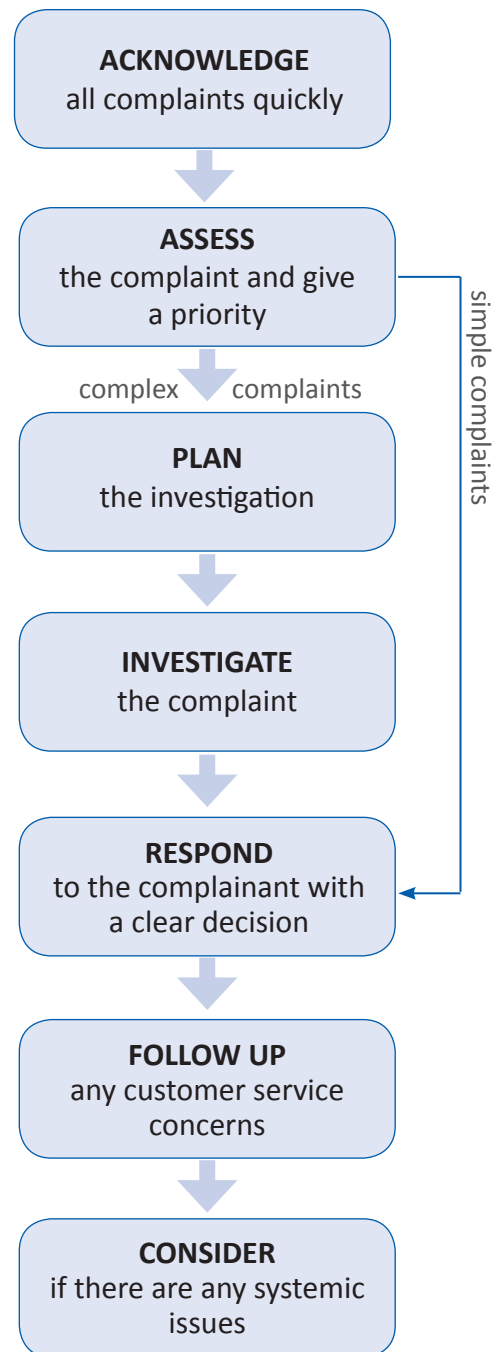


Better Practice Complaint Handling for Education Providers

February 2011

Complaint Handlers' Checklist

- Do you have written complaint handling procedures? Are they easy to understand and apply?
- Do you acknowledge complaints promptly?
- Do you assess complaints and give them a priority?
- Do you resolve complaints on first contact if the complaint is straightforward?
- Where a complaint is more complex, do you prepare a short written investigation plan to direct the handling of the complaint?
- Do you keep written records of oral evidence?
- Do you give the student an opportunity to comment or show cause, before a decision is made that is not in their favour?
- Do you keep the student advised of the progress of their complaint, if there is a delay?
- When the complaint is finalised, do you give the student a detailed explanation of the complaint investigation and the outcome?
- Do you advise students of their right to access an external complaints and appeal process, if they are not satisfied after the internal complaints and appeals process?
- Do you assess individual complaints to see if there are any systemic issues that warrant attention?
- Do you regularly analyse complaint data to see what might be going wrong and what can be improved?



Other things to think about

Accessibility:

- Do you make information about how to make a complaint freely available to students?
- Do you allow students to complain in a variety of ways (telephone, email, website and mail)?
- Do you encourage students to discuss or raise issues orally so that problems can be resolved quickly where possible?

Fairness:

- Is your complaint handling process confidential?
- Do you have a secure complaint handling database or system for recording complaints that is restricted to authorised staff?
- Are anonymous complaints accepted?
- Is each complaint handled with an open mind, without any prejudice arising from past issues with the student?
- Do you encourage complaint handling staff to report any conflict of interest, such as a relationship with the student or other personal interest?
- If a student complains about a staff member, do you ensure a different staff member investigates the complaint to ensure independence?
- Do you have timeliness standards for handling complaints?
- Do you advise students on first contact of the expected timeframes?
- Do you give students a contact number and preferably the name of a contact person?

Efficiency:

- Do you have regular internal reporting so that unresolved complaints can be escalated to more senior staff if necessary?

Responsiveness:

- Do you provide information about making a complaint in languages other than English?
- Do you provide help for students who have a visual or hearing impairment?
- Are staff willing to deal with a guardian, friend or advocate of a vulnerable person who wishes to complain?
- Do you have a policy for managing unreasonable complainant behaviour?
- Do you provide training for your staff in managing unreasonable complainant behaviour?

Integration:

- Are problems that are identified through complaints followed up by the areas responsible?

Culture and people:

- Does a senior manager have overall responsibility for complaints?
- Do staff at all levels understand and comply with your complaints and appeals policy?
- Are your staff given proper guidance and support to handle complaints?
- Do you monitor staff performance to ensure complaints are handled properly and appropriate remedies are provided?
- Are complaint handling staff good communicators, both orally and in writing?

More information?

www.oso.gov.au

Do you meet the National Code complaint handling standards?*

- All providers must have a documented internal complaints and appeals process for students

In some institutions, the words 'complaints' and 'appeals' have different meanings and result in different processes. The National Code 2007 allows the provider to differentiate between these terms and resulting processes, as long as the minimum requirements of Standard 8 are met and the differences are clearly explained in the provider's policies and procedures.

- Providers must give all overseas students information about the complaints and appeals process during their orientation program (standard 6)
- Providers must have a process in place for lodging a formal complaint or appeal if the matter cannot be resolved informally, which requires a written record of the complaint or appeal to be kept
- The student must be granted immediate access to the provider's complaints and appeals process. The process must begin within 10 working days of the formal lodgement of the complaint or appeal and supporting information
- The student must be given the opportunity to formally present his or her case at minimal or no cost
- The student must be allowed to be accompanied or assisted by a support person
- The provider must maintain the student's enrolment while the complaints and appeal process is ongoing. That is, the provider must not report the student through the Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS)
- The provider must take all reasonable measures to finalise the complaints and appeals process as soon as practicable
- The student must be given a written statement of the outcome of the internal complaints and appeals process, including details of the reasons for the outcome
- If the student is not satisfied with the result or conduct of the internal complaint handling and appeals process, the registered provider must advise the student of his or her right to access the external complaints and appeals process at minimal or no cost
- The registered provider must have arrangements in place for a person or body independent of and external to the registered provider to hear complaints or appeals arising from the registered provider's internal complaints and appeals process or refer students to an existing body where that body is appropriate for the complaint or appeal

* All registered education providers are required to meet Standard 8 'Complaints and Appeals' of the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007 (the National Code). See: http://aei.gov.au/AEI/ESOS/NationalCodeExplanatoryGuide/PartD/Standard_8.htm