



Overseas Students Ombudsman

Improve your student support
services through best practice
complaints resolution



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Overseas Students Ombudsman
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Overseas Students Ombudsman

- We investigate complaints from overseas students about private registered education and training providers
 - More than 1,000 complaints received since we began operating in April 2011
 - About 250+ different providers all over the country
 - We see good and bad practices
 - We recognise the diversity of the industry and take a principles-based approach

Overseas Students Ombudsman

- We provide information and support about best practice internal complaints handling to private education providers
 - Better Practice Guide
 - Online complaint handling training module planned for 2014



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?

ACKNOWLEDGE
all complaints quickly





The Value of Complaints

- Many problems can be identified and resolved early by providers when they have and promote a good internal complaints and appeals process
- Complaints provide critical feedback to organisations on areas of weakness and possible improvements
- Complaints provide opportunities to re-engage customers who might otherwise go elsewhere



The Value of Complaints

- Research shows:
 - for every customer complaint, there are 26 other unhappy customers who haven't complained
 - 96% of unhappy customers don't complain, however 91% of those will simply leave and never come back
 - A dissatisfied customer will tell between 9-15 people about their experience, around 13% of dissatisfied customers tell more than 20 people



The Value of Complaints

- Research shows:
 - Customers who get their issue resolved tell about 4-6 people about their experience
 - Dissatisfied customers whose complaints are taken care of are more likely to remain loyal satisfied customers
 - A customer is 4 times more likely to defect to a competitor if the problem is service related than price or product related
 - It costs 6 – 7 times more to acquire a new customer than retain an existing one



Standard 8 Requirements

- Providers must:
 - Have an internal complaints and appeals policy for dealing with formal complaints and appeals where concerns cannot be resolved informally
 - Create a written record of the complaint or appeal
 - Commence the complaints process within 10 working days of the complaint being lodged
 - Give the complainant an opportunity to present his or her case at minimal or no cost
 - Provide a written statement of the outcome of the complaint, including reasons



Standard 8 Requirements

- Providers must:
 - Provide an external complaints and appeals body
 - Must be independent and impartial
 - Preferably statutorily independent – OSO, SATA in South Australia
 - Advise students of their right to access the external appeals process at minimal or no cost
 - Implement their external body's decision or recommendation if it is in the student's favour.



How we investigate

- We are independent and impartial
- We investigate in private
- We give the provider an early opportunity to resolve any problems
- We ask the provider to explain what they did and why
- We request relevant documents from both parties

Better practice complaint handling

1. **Recognise** that there is a complaint
2. **Acknowledge** the complaint quickly
3. **Assess** the complaint's complexity
4. **Resolve** the complaint if possible
5. **Plan** the investigation
6. **Investigate** the complaint
7. **Respond** to the complaint
8. **Provide** access to an external complaints and appeals process
9. **Improve** systemic issues



Tips for managing complaints

- Ensure your complaints and appeals policy is easily accessible
- Acknowledge promptly, and keep students advised of progress
- Investigate complaints and consider appeals with an open mind
- Give students an opportunity to comment or show cause, before making a decision not in their favour
- Provide a written explanation of your reasons
- Advise students of their right to complain or appeal to OSO

Internal Appeal & Complaints

- Best practice:
 - Provider helps students access their appeal process
 - Providers agree to reconsider internal appeals where new information is provided at external appeal
- Poor practice:
 - Provider arguing with students by email rather than directing them into the internal appeal process & giving them a written decision with full reasons
 - Provider refusing to consider an internal appeal due to outstanding fees



Attendance

- Best practice:
 - Sending a warning when the student is absent for 5 consecutive days or before the student falls below 80%
 - A clear attendance policy and accurate attendance records
- Poor practice:
 - Failing to warn students before they fall below 80%
 - Provider unable to explain attendance calculations
 - Extending the student's enrolment without creating a new CoE and monitoring attendance over this period



Course Progress

- Best practice:
 - Implementing a meaningful intervention strategy as soon as the student is identified as at risk of failing to meet satisfactory course progress
- Poor practice:
 - Failing to implement an intervention strategy
 - Sending the notice of intent to report to the wrong address
 - Failing to the give the student appeal rights before report



Provider Transfers

- Best practice:
 - Policy states circumstances in which transfer will or will not be granted
 - Considering detriment to student as key factor
 - Providing a decision in writing including appeal rights
- Poor practice:
 - Non-compliant transfer policy
 - Giving verbal advice without inviting transfer request to ensure reasons are given and appeal rights
 - Failing to consider detriment



Refunds & Fee Disputes

- Best practice:
 - Clear written agreement with course name, study periods, itemised list of fees & refund policy included
 - Refunds paid within provider obligation period
- Poor practice:
 - Invalid written agreements missing essential details or signed by under 18 yo or home stay parent
 - Tuition fees accepted before agreement signed



Education Agents

- Best practice:
 - Current provider- education agency agreement
 - Provider investigates complaints against its agents
 - Provider takes action to remedy agent errors
- Poor practice:
 - Out of date agreement
 - Provider avoids responsibility for agent's actions
 - Ignores complaints
 - Refuses to terminate agent when knows of misconduct



Cancelling Enrolment

- Best practice:
 - Contacting students who do not commence/return before reporting for non-commencement/cessation of studies
 - Consider compassionate/compelling circumstances for deferral
- Poor practice:
 - Refusing deferral unreasonably & then reporting for non-attendance
 - Cancelling for non-payment of fees or misbehaviour without first providing internal appeal



Further Resources

- OSO Provider e-newsletter & OSO Better Practice Guide
www.oso.gov.au
- AS ISO 10002—2006 Customer satisfaction—Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations
 - SAI Global website: www.saiglobal.com
- Value of complaints statistics
 - www.beyondphilosophy.com/blog/the-value-of-complaints/



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