

Handling concerns, complaints, and academic appeals WVI

Outcome Standards for RTOs, standard: 2.7 and 2.8

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure:

- information about how to provide feedback, make complaints and academic appeals is publicly available and easily accessible,
- complainants are supported to provide feedback and make complaints,
- persons making a complaint and students submitting an academic appeal are afforded procedural fairness,
- complaints and academic appeals are actioned in a reasonable timeframe,
- outcomes of complaints and academic appeals are documented and communicated,
- feedback, complaints and outcomes of academic appeals are used to inform continuous improvement.

2. DEFINITIONS

Complainant means the person making a complaint, this may be a student, employer, trainer or any other person making a complaint. It is not limited to complaints made by students only.

Complaint generally means negative feedback about services or people which has not been resolved locally.

Academic Appeal. An appeal is an application by a student for reconsideration of an unfavourable decision or finding during their time with Wesley Vocational Institute. An appeal must be made in writing and specify the particulars of the decision or finding in dispute. Appeals must be lodged within 28 calendar days of the decision or finding being informed to the student.

3. POLICY STATEMENT - COMPLAINTS

3.1 Approach to complaints

Wesley Vocational Institute are open to receiving feedback and complaints. We are committed to providing a fair and transparent complaint handling process. We do this by:

- ensuring there is no detriment to people who complain,
- fostering a receptive, blame-free culture that is open to feedback and improvement,
- making information on our complaints handling process publicly available on our website and in our Student Handbook providing transparency regarding how complaints and feedback are handled, what complainants can expect and expected timeframes for resolution of complaints.

3.2 Ensuring procedural fairness

Wesley Vocational Institute implement the following mechanisms to ensure procedural fairness when handling complaints:

- the complaint is handled by an unbiased person,
- both the complainant and the subject of the complaint (where this is a person) are given an opportunity to be heard and to provide relevant information,
- similar complaints are treated in a consistent manner to ensure fairness and reliability in the resolution process,
- a person making a complaint will be informed of any outcome or decision before the decision is implemented and will have the option to respond,
- the privacy of complainants is protected, and the information included in a complaint is kept confidential.

3.3 Early Resolution of Complaints

In all cases, issues that arise during training and assessment that are the source of frustration or are in dispute should be resolved at the time they occur between the persons involved. It is often the case that complaints can be avoided by proper communication and respect between persons involved. Where the issue cannot be resolved locally and needs to be raised as a complaint is to be made in accordance with the following section.

3.4 Making a Complaint

A complaint must be received by Wesley Vocational Institute in a written form (e.g. email). Complaints may be made by any person.

The complaints policy must be publicly available. This means that the complaints policy and will be published on the Wesley Vocational Institute website.

Complaints are to be handled in the strictest confidence. No Wesley Vocational Institute representative is to disclose information to any person without the permission of the RTO CEO. A decision to release information to third parties can only be made after the complainant has given permission for this to occur. This permission should be given by providing written consent.

Wesley Vocational Institute shall maintain the enrolment of the complainant (student) during the complaint handling process.

The complainant is entitled to be heard with access to all relevant information and with the right of reply ensuring procedural fairness is applied at every stage of the complaint process.

The complainant may be accompanied and/or assisted by a support person at any relevant meeting. Where the complainant is a child or young complainant, they may be accompanied by a family member or carer at any relevant meeting.

3.5 Communicating the Complaint Handling Policy and Procedure

The complaints handling policy will be:

- Publicly available on the Wesley Vocational Institute website.
- Included in the Wesley Vocational Institute Student Handbook.

Complainants are also encouraged to provide feedback to their Trainer, the Student Support Officer or any other Wesley Vocational Institute staff member at any time, as outlined in the *Student Handbook WVI*.

3.6 Complaint Handling Timeframe

We are committed to resolving complaints in a reasonable timeframe and without unnecessary delay. While we will respond to all complaints in a timely manner, some complaints may require more urgent attention than others, and some complaints may take longer to resolve than others.

- **Written Acknowledgement** - The first step is written acknowledgement by Wesley Vocational Institute **no later than 48 hours** from the time the complaint is received. This acknowledgement is intended to provide the complainant assurance that Wesley Vocational Institute has received the complaint and will review the relevant issues and provide a response as soon as practical. The acknowledgement must inform the person that they will receive a written response.
- **Initial Assessment and Categorisation** - Wesley Vocational Institute will triage complaints by classifying complaints based on severity, urgency, and nature, and prioritising cases that need immediate attention. An initial assessment and categorisation of the complaint will be conducted **within 2 working days** based on:
 - **Severity:** Determine if the complaint involves safety, harassment, discrimination, or legal concerns, which would necessitate urgent action. Less severe complaints could involve general dissatisfaction or requests for improvement.
 - **Urgency:** Consider how soon the issue needs to be resolved. Complaints that could impact ongoing training sessions or reputation may need to be escalated.
 - **Nature of Complaint:** Identify if it's related to training and assessment, trainer behaviour, administrative issues, or facilities.

Prioritisation

Assign a priority level (e.g., critical, high, medium, low) based on the assessment. For instance:

- **Critical:** Complaints with legal or safety implications, or those that could harm complainants' well-being.
 - **High:** Issues with significant impact on training quality or participant experience, such as trainer behaviour or course content.
 - **Medium:** Less urgent issues, like scheduling or minor logistical concerns.
 - **Low:** Minor complaints, often administrative or preference-based, which don't require immediate resolution.
- **Handling the complaint** - Complaints that have been categorised as Severe, with a Critical priority rating, will be acted on immediately and also follow Wesley Mission's incident reporting policy and procedure.

The handling of all complaints will commence within **seven (7) calendar days** of the lodgement of the complaint and all reasonable measures will be taken to finalise the process as soon as practicable. A written response must be provided to the complainant within **fourteen (14) calendar days** of the lodgement of the complaint.

As a benchmark, Wesley Vocational Institute should attempt to resolve complaints as soon as possible. A timeframe to resolve a complaint within **thirty (30) calendar days** is considered acceptable and in the best interest of Wesley Vocational Institute and the complainant.

A complainant should also be provided with regular updates to inform them of the process of the complaint handling. Updates should be provided to the complainant at a minimum of **two (2) weekly intervals**.

Complaints must be resolved to a final outcome within **thirty (30) calendar days** of the complaint being initially received. Where Wesley Vocational Institute Chief Executive Officer considers that more than 30 calendar days are required to process and finalise the complaint, the CEO or delegated person must inform the complainant in writing, including reasons why more than 30 calendar days are required, and maintain regular fortnightly contact with the complainant including to explain any further delays.

3.7 Unresolved Complaints

Once the complaint handling process has concluded; where the person making a complaint remains not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint handling procedure, the person is to be advised that they have the right to refer the matter to any external authority/agency that may be relevant to their complaint.

The following external agencies are nominated in the first instance as relevant points of referral the person may consider:

- In relation to consumer related issues, the person may refer their complaint to the **Office of Fair Trading**.
- In relation to the delivery of training and assessment services, the person may refer their complaint to the **National Training Complaints Service** via the following phone number: 13 38 73 or visit the website at <https://www.dewr.gov.au/national-training-complaints-hotline> or alternatively to the Australian Skills Quality Authority at the following website <https://asqaportal.asqa.gov.au/Make-a-Report/?from=tip-off>
- In relation to matters relating to privacy, the person may refer their complaint to the **Office of the Australian Information Commissioner** via the following details: <https://www.oaic.gov.au/individuals/how-do-i-make-a-privacy-complaint> or call on 1300 363 992

This guidance is also communicated to complainants within the Student Handbook and also within the publicly available policies and procedures on Wesley Vocational Institute website. It is expected that the above agencies will investigate the persons concerns and contact the Wesley Vocational Institute for information. External agencies will typically request a copy of any record of how the complaint was handled from the person. Wesley Vocational Institute is to ensure that the person is provided with a written response that they may use for this purpose.

The Wesley Vocational Institute is to cooperate fully with agencies such as the National Training Complaints Service, the Office of Fair Trading or ASQA that may investigate the handling of a complaint. Wesley Vocational Institute considers that it would be extremely unlikely that a complaint is not able to be resolved quickly within Wesley Vocational Institute internal arrangements.

3.8 Record Management of Complaint Records

Records relating to complaints will present in two formats. There will be electronic records in the form of email correspondence and other documents which are communicated electronically and hard copy records which are submitted by the complainant or generated by Wesley Vocational Institute. There is also a record of the complaint maintained within the Wesley Vocational Institute complainant management system. This includes the details about the complaint and a diary log which records the progress of the complaint handling and closure. This record also records identified opportunities for improvement that result from complaints handling.

All records regardless of their format will be saved in a digital format into a secure folder located on the Wesley Vocational Institute file storage. Each file is to be clearly labelled with the document title or subject and the date of which the document was received or generated. This folder must only be accessible to persons authorised by the Chief Executive Officer. Records stored on the complainant management system are to be accessible only to administrators and managers.

A correspondence record must be made for each complainant making a complaint. All email and letter communication should be retained with the complainant correspondence record within the complaint handling file.

3.9 Period of retention of Complaints Records

Wesley Vocational Institute is to retain records relating to complaints handling for a minimum of three (3) years.

4. POLICY STATEMENT – ACADEMIC APPEALS

4.1 Who and what does this policy apply to?

This policy relates to appeals of decisions made by Wesley Vocational Institute. These appeals may be submitted by a student where Wesley Vocational Institute has made a decision that is relevant to the student, or which effects the student in some way. Where Wesley Vocational Institute makes a decision which does not relate to or effect a student, the student is not eligible to appeal the decision.

The following are some examples of decisions that a student might appeal:

- an assessment decision of the student's knowledge and skills,
- an administrative decision that effects the student directly,
- a policy decision that changes the nature of the terms of service that the student agreed to at the time of their enrolment,
- a decision to change the nature of the service being delivered that the student agreed to at the time of their enrolment.

4.2 Ensuring procedural fairness

Wesley Vocational Institute implement the following mechanisms to ensure procedural fairness when handling appeals:

- the appeal is handled by an unbiased person not involved in making the original decision
- the student is given an opportunity to be heard and to provide relevant information
- the privacy of all parties involved is protected, and the information included in an appeal is kept confidential. Only individuals directly involved in the appeals process will have access to the appeal information.
- information is handled sensitively to ensure that students feel safe and supported when lodging an appeal.

4.3 The appeals period

Students have the right to appeal decisions within **28 calendar days** of receiving notification of the decision. Appeals submitted after this period may not be considered.

4.4 Early Resolution of Appeals

Students are encouraged to resolve any concerns they may have directly with the Wesley Vocational Institute staff member involved in the first instance. It is often the case that the student's decision to make an appeal can be avoided by proper communication and consultation with students at the time a decision is made.

4.5 Submitting an Appeal

If the student is unable to resolve the issue directly with the Wesley Vocational Institute staff member, they should raise the appeal with the WVI Manager or Quality and Performance Manager. This must then be done in writing by completing a *Request for an Appeal of a Decision WVI form*. The student may submit it via email or hard copy via the post.

4.6 Communicating the Appeals Handling Policy and Procedure

The appeals handling policy and procedure will be:

- publicly available on the Wesley Vocational Institute website,
- included in the Wesley Vocational Institute Policy and Procedure.

4.7 Confidentiality

Appeals are to be handled in the strictest of confidence. No Wesley Vocational Institute representative is to disclose information to any person without the permission of Wesley Vocational Institute CEO. A decision to release information to third parties can only be made after the student has given permission for this to occur. This permission should be given as a written consent.

4.8 Appeals Handling Timeframe

Wesley Vocational Institute will provide written acknowledgement of receiving the appeal no later than **48 hours** from the time the appeal is received using the appeals *written acknowledgment email template*. The acknowledgement must inform the student that they will receive a written response within **14 days** to explain the appeals handling process and the person's rights and obligations.

Appeals must be resolved to a final outcome within **thirty (30) calendar days** of the appeal being initially received. Where Wesley Vocational Institute Chief Executive Officer considers that more than 30 calendar days are required to process and finalise the appeal, the CEO must inform the student in writing, including reasons why more than 30 calendar days are required.

4.9 Unresolved Appeals

Once the appeals handling process has concluded; where the person seeking an appeal of a decision remains not satisfied with the outcome of the appeals handling procedure, the person is to be advised that they have the right to refer the matter to any external authority/agency that may be relevant to their appeal. The following external agencies are nominated in the first instance as relevant points of referral the person may consider:

- In relation to consumer related issues, the person may refer their complaint to the **Office of Fair Trading**.
- In relation to the delivery of training and assessment services, the person may refer their complaint to the **National Training Complaints Service** via the following phone number: 13 38 73 or visit the website at <https://www.dewr.gov.au/national-training-complaints-hotline> or alternatively to the Australian Skills Quality Authority at the following website <https://asqportal.asqa.gov.au/Make-a-Report/?from=tip-off>
- In relation to matters relating to privacy, the person may refer their complaint to the **Office of the Australian Information Commissioner** via the following details: <https://www.oaic.gov.au/individuals/how-do-i-make-a-privacy-complaint> or call on 1300 363 992

This guidance is also communicated to students within the Student Handbook and also within the publicly available policies and procedures on Wesley Vocational Institute website. It is expected that the above agencies will investigate the persons concerns and contact the Wesley Vocational Institute for information. External agencies will typically request a copy of any record of how the appeal was handled from the person. Wesley Vocational Institute is to ensure that the person is provided with a written response that they may use for this purpose.

Wesley Vocational Institute is to cooperate fully with agencies such the Office of Fair Trading or ASQA that may investigate the handling of an appeal. Wesley Vocational Institute considers that it would be extremely unlikely that an appeal is not able to be resolved quickly within Wesley Vocational Institute internal arrangements.

4.10 Record Management of Appeals Records

Records relating to appeals will present in two formats. There will be electronic records in the form of email correspondence and other documents which are communicated electronically and records which are submitted by the student or generated by Wesley Vocational Institute. There is also a record of the appeal maintained within the Wesley Vocational Institute student management system. This includes the details about the appeal and a diary log which records the progress of the appeal handling and closure. This record also records identified opportunities for improvement that result from appeals handling.

All records regardless of their format will be saved in a digital format into a secure folder located on the Wesley Vocational Institute file storage. Each file is to be clearly labelled with

the document title or subject and the date of which the document was received or generated. This folder must only be accessible to persons authorised by the Chief Executive Officer. Records stored on the student management system are to be accessible only to administrators and managers.

4.11 Period of retention of Appeals Records

Wesley Vocational Institute is to retain records relating to appeals handling for a minimum of **three (3) years**.

5. CONSULTATION AND APPROVAL

This policy has been developed in consultation with RTO CEO and Quality and Performance Manager.

The policy has been approved by the RTO CEO.