STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Policy
Study Group Australia Pty Ltd (SGA) is committed to developing and maintaining an effective, timely, fair and equitable complaint handling system which is easily accessible and offered to complainants at no charge. This policy applies to and provides rights in favour of students who have accepted a place at SGA (enrolled student).

SGA aims to:

- develop a culture that views complaints as an opportunity to improve the organisation and how it works;
- set in place a complaints handling system that is client focussed and helps the Institution to prevent complaints from recurring;
- ensure that any complaints are resolved promptly, objectively and with sensitivity and in complete confidentiality;
- ensure that the views of each complainant and respondent are respected and that any party to a complaint is not discriminated against nor victimised at any stage of the process;
- ensure that there is a consistent response to complaints.

A complaint can be defined as a person’s expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of SGA’s services and/or activities.

A complaint may be an expression of dissatisfaction by an enrolled student with:

- the enrolment, induction/orientation process;
- the quality of education provided;
- academic matters including student progress, assessment, curriculum and awards in a course of study;
- the way personal information has been handled or access to personal records; or
- the way someone has been treated.

This Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure is designed to ensure that SGA responds effectively to individual cases of dissatisfaction.

Procedure

Before an Issue Becomes a Formal Complaint

Enrolled students are encouraged, wherever possible, to resolve concerns or difficulties directly with the person(s) concerned. For example, if the issue concerns an academic matter, the student should talk honestly to the Lecturer about their concerns, a homestay problem is best resolved with the homestay coordinator, and issues about fees should be discussed in the first instance with the Bursar.

If the student has attempted to resolve the issue directly but is not satisfied with the outcome, or does not wish to approach the person(s) concerned directly, then they may discuss the issue with the Campus Grievance Counsellor. The student may be accompanied or assisted by a support person during this time.

The Campus Grievance Counsellor will consider the issue and may either suggest a course of action to resolve the student’s issue or attempt to resolve the dispute between the student and the person(s) concerned.

The Campus Grievance Counsellor will provide the student and the person(s) concerned with a brief written report summarising the actions that were taken, or will be taken, to resolve the issue.

If the student is not satisfied with the outcome, then they may lodge a formal complaint under this policy.

Reviews of Grades

A process for requesting a review of a grade forms part of the Student Assessment Policy and Procedure. Students should utilise this process in the first instance if they wish to request a review of a grade. Students who remain dissatisfied with the outcome of their review may then utilise the following formal complaints section of this policy.
Formal Complaints

Formal complaints of an academic or non-academic nature may be lodged using this procedure by students enrolled in a course of study with the Institution. Complaints of an academic nature include matters related to student progress, assessment, curriculum and awards in a course of study. Complaints of a non-academic nature include all other matters.

During all stages of the Student complaint and appeals process the Institution will take all steps to ensure that the complainant and the respondent will not be victimised or discriminated against.

At all stages of this procedure a full explanation in writing for decisions and actions taken as part of the process will be provided if so requested by the complainant or the respondent.

Initial Complaint:

Formal complaints must be submitted in writing to the Campus Grievance Counsellor.

To commence the formal process, the student must complete a Student Complaint Lodgement Form or write a letter and send it to the Campus Grievance Counsellor at the campus at which they are studying.

The following information needs to be provided in writing:

- details of the complaint;
- supporting information that the student wishes to be considered as part of the complaint;
- an explanation of the steps already taken to try to resolve the complaint informally and why the responses received are not considered satisfactory; and
- what the student thinks needs to be done to address their concerns.

The Campus Grievance Counsellor will commence the process of considering the complaint within 10 working days of receiving the written Complaint Lodgement Form or letter and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing to the student.

The Campus Grievance Counsellor will ensure all steps are taken to resolve the complaint within 20 working days.

In considering the complaint, the Campus Grievance Counsellor will arrange a meeting with the student to enable them to formally present their case. The student may be accompanied or assisted by a support person at any meeting. The complaint will be investigated by the Campus Grievance Counsellor who will discuss the student’s issues with the person(s) concerned, and may confer with the relevant State Academic Director.

If the Campus Grievance Counsellor considers that the complaint is upheld they will make a recommendation to the relevant State Academic Director (or nominee).

If the Academic Director (or nominee) ratifies the decision then they will immediately notify relevant staff to implement the actions required to resolve the complaint. The student will be provided with a written report on the steps taken to address the complaint within 20 working days of the commencement of the complaint process.

If the complaint is not upheld, then the student will be given a written explanation detailing the reasons for that decision.

The Grievance Counsellor will retain a written record of the complaint and its outcome.

Appeals / Internal:

If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, or a decision made under any other policy, they may lodge an appeal to the Campus Director/State Academic Director within 20 working days of receipt of the written report of the outcomes of their initial complaint or decision made under another policy. Appeals should be lodged in writing on an Appeal Request Form, available from the Campus Grievance Counsellor, or in a letter.

The Campus Director/State Academic Director will convene an appeals panel within 5 working days of receipt of the appeal. The panel will consist of the Campus Director/State Academic Director (or independent nominee) as Chair, and two other senior staff members who have not been involved in the complaint so far.

The panel will meet within 20 working days. The student will be informed of the membership of the panel and the procedure to be followed, at least 5 working days in advance of the panel’s meeting.

The review will be conducted in private and all relevant facts will be taken into consideration. The student and all involved parties may attend and be accompanied by a support person who may speak and act on their
behalf, including providing evidence. If the complaint involves another person they will also be invited to present their case separately to the panel. A written record of the meeting/s will be taken.

The student will be notified of the decision of the appeals process in writing within 5 working days of the decision. If the appeal is upheld the student will be informed of the actions to be taken to resolve the complaint. If the appeal is not upheld, then the student will be given a written explanation including the reasons for that decision.

In the event of the student remaining dissatisfied with the result or conduct of SGA’s internal procedures for handling of the complaint, the student has the right to access an external appeals process under the provisions of the ESOS Act and the National Code.

A student may lodge an external appeal or make an external complaint about a decision by contacting the Overseas Students Ombudsman. The Overseas Students Ombudsman offers a free and independent service for overseas students who have a complaint or want to lodge an external appeal about a decision made by their private education or training provider. See the Overseas Students Ombudsman website www.oso.gov.au or phone 1300 362 072 for more information.

If the external review process supports the complaint, SGA will immediately implement any decision and/or action required, and advise the student in writing. If the complaint is not upheld, then he/she will be given a written explanation including the reasons for that decision.

Record keeping and confidentiality

Records of all complaints handled under this procedure and their outcomes shall be maintained for a period of at least five years to allow all parties to the complaint appropriate access to these records, upon written request to the Campus Director/State Academic Director. Records of student complaints will be maintained at the last campus that the student studied.

A register of complaints and appeals will be maintained by the Campus Director/State Academic Director.

All records relating to complaints and their outcomes will be treated as confidential and will be kept in a separate file in a secure environment in accordance with the Institution’s Records Management and Privacy Policies.

A copy of the statement of the findings at each stage of the process will be provided to the student.

Register of complaints and appeals

A register of complaints and appeals will be maintained by the Campus Director/State Academic Director. For each complaint/appeal, the following is recorded:

- details of the parties involved
- the documents lodged
- details of the complaint/appeal
- details of the resolution or other outcome

Additional Information

This procedure will be made available to students, or those seeking to enrol in a course of study with the Institution, regardless of the location of the campus at which the complaint has arisen, the mode in which they study or their place of residence.

If a student chooses to lodge a formal complaint their enrolment will be maintained while the complaints and appeals process is ongoing.

Nothing in this Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure limits the rights of students or persons seeking to enrol with the Institution to take action under Australia’s Consumer Protection laws. The procedures set out in this document do not replace or modify procedures or any other responsibilities which may arise under other higher education provider policies or under statute or any other law. Also, these procedures do not circumscribe an individual’s rights to pursue other legal remedies.

Publication

This Policy and Procedure will be disseminated by publication in the Student Handbook and on the Institution’s website. This Policy and Procedure will also be discussed at Student Orientation.

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 Staff Web Portal.
Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure Flow Chart

INFORMAL COMPLAINT
Speak to the person involved

REVIEW OF GRADE
Refer to Assessment Policy

IF UNRESOLVED

INFORMAL COMPLAINT
Speak to the Campus Grievance Counsellor

REVIEW OF GRADE
Refer to Assessment Policy

IF UNRESOLVED

LODGE FORMAL COMPLAINT
Complete a Complaint form or write a letter to the Grievance Counsellor
Student receives written acknowledgement of complaint within 10 working days of lodgement
Grievance Counsellor seeks to resolve complaint in 20 working days
Student receives written notification of outcome

IF UNRESOLVED

CASE REVIEW PANEL
Complete a Complaint form or write a letter to the Campus Director/State Academic Director within 20 days of receipt of initial appeal report
Campus Director/State Academic Director convenes an Appeals Panel with 5 days of receipt complaint and panel meets within 20 working days of receipt of complaint.
Student given at least 5 working days notice in advance of panel meeting.
Student receives written notification within 5 working days of decision

IF UNRESOLVED

EXTERNAL APPEAL
Lodge an appeal to Overseas Students ombudsman at www.oso.gov.au

Version Control

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