
ACARA POLICY

COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

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1.0 PURPOSE OF THE COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

To provide effective management, recording and reporting of stakeholder complaints and feedback, in line with the *Australian Standard – Customer satisfaction – Guidelines for complaints handling in organisations (AS ISO 10002 – 2006)*, for the purpose of improving the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) service delivery.

2.0 ACARA POLICY STATEMENT

ACARA is committed to providing services of the highest quality. Key to meeting this commitment is using stakeholder feedback as opportunities to improve the quality of services provided.

ACARA is committed to ensuring that complaints received are handled in a manner which is fair, courteous and respects the privacy of the person making the complaint. ACARA is also committed to ensuring that reasons are provided for decisions made in relation to any complaint received.

ACARA is also committed to making available simple procedures and providing all reasonable assistance to those who choose to make a complaint.

3.0 DEFINITIONS

Complaints are defined as any expression of dissatisfaction or grievance made to staff by a stakeholder in relation to ACARA business. For the purpose of this document, *complaints* are referred to as those complaints which have been registered as formal complaints via the verbal or written complaint handling procedure.

Stakeholder is defined as: a representative of an educational institution, an education professional, academic, political representative, parent, student or any member of the general public.

Feedback is communication of responses and reaction to ACARA business. Feedback includes complaints.

4.0 COVERAGE

The policy applies to all complaints and feedback about ACARA services and ways of doing business. It pertains to ACARA staff and employees who may receive, manage and/or investigate complaints.

Complaints not covered by this policy include those relating to decisions made by Courts or Tribunals.

ACARA may not accept or action complaints relating to matters that are very old, which have been previously dealt with or finalised, are outside its jurisdiction or which are vexatious or frivolous.

Complaints from ACARA employees or their representatives are to be dealt with in accordance with the Dispute Handling Policy.

5.0 KEY FEATURES

The key elements of the ACARA Complaint Handling Policy include:

- Increase stakeholder satisfaction with ACARA services
- A fair and transparent approach to handling complaints received by ACARA
- Respect of complainants' privacy
- Complaints being best resolved informally by the people involved
- Procedures which are developed in line with the Commonwealth Ombudsmen's *Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling*.

6.0 PRINCIPLES

6.1. Making it easy for clients to provide feedback

ACARA will ensure that lodging a complaint is relatively easy, straightforward and accessible for stakeholders.

If a stakeholder does not speak or write English well, ACARA can arrange for translation and interpreter services.

6.2. Resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity

ACARA will endeavour to resolve the complaint as early in the process as possible.

6.3. Commitment

ACARA values feedback from stakeholders and views it as an essential component for improving its services.

ACARA is fully committed to providing an integrated complaints handling process. ACARA welcomes feedback to improve the ACARA Complaints Handling Process.

6.4. Fairness and impartiality

While members of ACARA's staff have an obligation to be fair and impartial under the *ACARA Code of Conduct*, handling a complaint in that way also reduces the risk of it escalating further.

Even if a member of ACARA's staff does not agree with the behaviour of a complainant, staff focus will be on resolving the substance of the complaint.

6.5. Communicating effectively

Effective communication with complainants throughout the process can help avoid complaints escalating further. All complaints will be acknowledged and complainants will be kept informed about the progress of their matters, particularly when delays occur.

6.6. Having clear roles and responsibilities for responding to complaints

To ensure the best results are achieved, every member of the complaints handling team will understand their own role and responsibility in handling with the complaint.

6.7. Keeping accurate records of complaints

ACARA will ensure that accurate records of complaints are kept. This will enable a complaint to be reviewed efficiently and will also ensure that ACARA has reliable data about complaints that it can use to improve services.

6.8. Using complaint data to improve services and inform planning

A key function of any complaint process is to help identify areas that need improvement. ACARA will commit to the careful analysis of complaint sources and trends to assist decisions about planning and resourcing those improvements.

6.9. Protecting the privacy of complaints

As well as ACARA staff obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988*, staff will respect requests from a stakeholder for a complaint to be handled confidentially or anonymously.

7.0 RECORDING COMPLAINTS

All complaints made, verbal or written, will be recorded at a central point by ACARA at the time the complaint is made, or as soon as possible afterwards. The complaint will be recorded by the ACARA staff member who took the details.

When taking a complaint, ACARA staff will record the name and contact details of the stakeholder, as well as full details of the complaint including the date. Details of all communication with the stakeholder and any actions to resolve the complaint will be recorded in the same place.

Recorded complaints will also be monitored for any ongoing trends by management and efforts made to resolve any ongoing issues.

Stakeholders' personal details or details of their complaint will not be divulged to third parties unless ACARA has obtained the written consent of the stakeholder(s).

8.0 KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Complaints Handling Manager is responsible and accountable for the receipt, allocation and follow up of all complaints about ACARA.

The following section outlines the roles of various ACARA staff members in the handling of complaints about ACARA.

8.1 Role of the Complaints Handling Manager

The Complaints Handling Manager is responsible for coordinating the internal complaint resolution process and is the contact for external stakeholders and complaint-making bodies.

The Complaints Handling Manager is also responsible for:

- combining their knowledge of complaint resolution with the expertise of other ACARA staff and managers to provide effective outcomes for complainants;
- reviewing complaints and allocating them to an appropriate General Manager
- (depending on the seriousness and complexity of the complaint) for investigation and resolution;
- reviewing and amending written responses for consistency, accuracy, and completeness;
- seeking advice from executive team or the CEO, where necessary to resolve a complaint;
- providing timely, consistent, and fair responses for complainants in accordance with ACARA's complaints handling policy;
- ensuring quality of data recorded in the Communications Register;
- reporting to management on complaint outcomes and making recommendations to management, based on complaint data and trends;
- monitoring/tracking the complaint; and
- resolving the complaint based on recommendations made by the allocated person / Manager or General Manager.

8.2 ACARA Complaints Handling Personnel

The Government Affairs and Risk unit is the central point for all complaint related telephone calls, facsimiles, letters and e-mails and is therefore responsible for:

- Identifying that the complaint is in regards to a person, procedure, agent or privacy
- Entering details of the complaint on the Complaints Register
- Forwarding / allocating the complaint to the Complaints Handling Manager

8.3 Role of the Allocated Person

The allocated person (General Manager, Manager, Senior Policy Officer or other ACARA staff member) is responsible for:

- Preparing a letter of acknowledgment for signature by the Complaints Handling Manager;
- Assist with the investigation of the complaint;
- Ensuring accurate recording of findings and proper documentation;

- Preparing/providing a response to the complaint following investigation into the procedures;
- Updating details and results of the complaint on the Complaints register;
- Preparing summary reports on findings of the complaint investigation; and
- Making recommendations to resolve the complaint.

9.0 RELEVANT LEGISLATION

- Privacy Act 1988
- Freedom of Information Act 1982

All ACARA staff will be made aware of the relevant parts of these Acts and legislation on an ongoing basis through training and/or induction programs.

10.0 RELATED POLICIES

- ACARA Code of Conduct

11.0 ALTERNATIVE AVENUES

The Commonwealth Ombudsman can investigate complaints about actions and decisions of Australian Government agencies and authorities to see if they are wrong, unjust, unlawful, discriminatory or unfair. The Ombudsman also seeks remedies for those affected by administrative deficiency, and acts to improve public administration generally.

Information relating to making a complaint via the Commonwealth Ombudsman is available at www.ombudsman.gov.au.