

## Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

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RTO: 22234

### Policy

- 1.1 If a student has a complaint that they wish to raise with Ashton College, they are encouraged to do so through the Complaints and Appeals procedure. Students are also encouraged to appeal any Ashton College decision if they feel they have grounds via the Appeals process as per this policy. This includes assessment and RPL decisions.
- 1.2 Students may lodge informal and formal complaints. Students may also access Ashton College's internal and external appeals process.
- 1.3 The College has a procedure for informal/ formal complaints and internal and external appeals processing/ handling.
- 1.3 Ashton College ensures that no student or stakeholder will suffer any form of disadvantage, victimisation, or discrimination as a result of lodging a complaint or appeal. This commitment applies throughout the informal, formal, internal, and external processes.
- 1.4 The CEO is responsible for implementing this policy and reviewing its effectiveness in compliance with regulatory guidelines.
- 1.5 This policy is implemented in accordance with the Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2025, clauses 2.7 and 2.8; the ELICOS Standards 2018; the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 Standard 10 and Fees and Refunds Policy and Procedure.
- 1.6 This policy and procedure apply to all Ashton College students.
- 1.7 Students can download the Complaints & Appeals form from the 'Forms and Policies' section, complete it, and submit it electronically via the feedback section or by emailing it to [support@ashtoncollege.edu.au](mailto:support@ashtoncollege.edu.au).
- 1.8 Students are provided information on the College's complaints and appeals policy and procedure pre- and post-enrolment.
- 1.9 Ashton College encourages all parties to approach a complaint or appeal with an open mind and to attempt to resolve problems through discussion and conciliation.
- 1.10 Students may be accompanied and assisted by a representative at any time.
- 1.11 Students' enrolments are maintained whilst an internal complaint or appeal is in progress and the outcome has not been determined.
- 1.12 If there is any matter arising from a student complaint or appeal that is a systemic issue that requires improvement action this will be reported to the Ashton College management meeting as part of the continuous improvement process.
- 1.13 The student will incur no cost during the complaints and appeals process unless they seek external representation.
- 1.14 Complaints and appeals are taken seriously by the College and actions are initiated within 10 days of receipt of a complaint or appeal. We act upon the outcome of any complaint found to be substantiated. Appeals must be lodged within 20 working days of the decision of a complaint process or assessment result.
- 1.15 The Overseas Students Ombudsman offers a free and independent service for overseas students who wish to appeal a decision after the conclusion of the internal complaints and appeals process. Further information can be obtained from the Overseas Students Ombudsman website <https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/> or phone 1300 362 072 for more information.
- 1.16 Ashton College's Complaints and Appeals policy in no way affects the students' rights to act under the *Australian Consumer Law* if the *Australian Consumer Law* applies.

## Procedure

All complaints are assessed upon receipt to determine their urgency and impact. Critical incidents or matters relating to student safety, legal obligations, or significant welfare concerns will be prioritised for immediate resolution under the Critical Incident Policy.

### 2. Informal Complaint Process – General Complaints

- 2.1 Students are encouraged to approach any member of Ashton College staff and make an informal complaint against trainers, students, any third-party service provider, assessments, processes, etc.
- 2.2 Where possible staff members utilize advice, discussions, and general mediation in relation to the issue/complaint. Staff members try and resolve the issue informally.
- 2.3 Any staff member can be involved in this informal process to resolve issues. Staff members refer students to the admin coordinator or managerial staff if they feel they cannot, or it is not appropriate for them to try and resolve the complaint/ issue. The managerial staff may seek advice from or delegate the handling of the complaint to academic or welfare personnel.
- 2.4 Staff may arrange a future meeting with the student if further investigation is required.
- 2.5 The outcome of the investigation is communicated to the student within an agreed timescale.
- 2.6 If the complaint is against the managerial staff another member of staff should be approached and dealt with the complaint.
- 2.7 The outcome of the informal complaint should be communicated to the student within 10 working days of lodgement.
- 2.8 Students must continue to attend classes while their complaint is being considered as their attendance and/or course progress will continue to be monitored during the complaint review process.
- 2.9 Students who are not satisfied with the outcome of the informal process are encouraged to lodge a formal complaint.
- 2.10 Complaints and outcomes are logged in the Student Management System (SMS) for continuous improvement purposes.

### 3. Formal process - General Complaints

- 3.1 Students are encouraged to make a formal complaint against trainers, students, and any third-party service provider should they be dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal complaint process. If they wish to make a formal complaint, they can download the Complaints & Appeals form from the 'Forms and Policies' section, complete it, and submit it electronically via the feedback section or by emailing it to [support@ashtoncollege.edu.au](mailto:support@ashtoncollege.edu.au)
- 3.2 Students must continue to attend classes while their complaint is being considered as their attendance and/or course progress will continue to be monitored during the complaint review process.
- 3.3 The college will process the complaint/ appeal within 10 working days of lodgement.
- 3.4 The college will give students every opportunity to present their case during this process and try to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of the student where possible.
- 3.5 The college delegate (the member of staff allocated to handle the complaint) will investigate the complaint and liaise with appropriate staff if necessary to ensure all the facts are considered prior to make any decision.
- 3.6 If appropriate, the college delegate may seek advice from internal/ external Welfare Support services and/or involve welfare support personnel in the handling of the complaint.
- 3.7 If appropriate, the College delegate may seek advice from Academic staff and/ or involve Academic staff in the handling of the complaint.

- 3.8 If appropriate the college delegate may implement the Critical Incident policy if they believe the issue meets the criteria to be deemed so.
- 3.9 The college delegate may re-allocate the handling of the complaint to an appropriate staff member if applicable.
- 3.10 The college delegate may arrange a meeting with the student during the investigation process if appropriate. If a meeting is initiated the college delegate and at least one other appropriate member of staff will attend the meeting and review the evidence in coming to a decision.
  - Meeting minutes will be taken and made available to all parties.
  - Students' have the right to seek advice from and be represented by external parties at any time during the complaints and appeals process. The cost of this will be borne by the student.
  - At the meeting the student has the opportunity to submit and discuss the grounds/ evidence for their complaint.
- 3.11 College staff considers all evidence from the student and the college in coming to decisions.
- 3.12 College staff clarifies evidence/ information to ensure they fully understand all aspects of the issue.
- 3.13 On reviewing the evidence, the staff member will attempt to negotiate a resolution to the issue/ complaint if appropriate.
- 3.14 The college delegate notifies the student in writing of Ashton College's decision within 3 working days of the decision being made. This will include reasons for the decision.
- 3.15 Students are notified of their right to appeal any decision within 20 working days of receiving notification if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the process. They are also notified on how to access the process.
- 3.16 All formal complaints and outcomes are recorded in the Continuous Improvement register.
- 3.17 If a student's complaint is substantiated through this process the college delegate will take immediate corrective action.
- 3.18 All relevant documentation relating to the complaint is stored in the student's file.

#### **4. Internal appeals process – General appeals**

- 4.1 If students are not satisfied with college decisions, Students can make an appeal by filling the Complaints & Appeals form from the 'Forms and Policies' section, complete it, and submit it electronically via the feedback section or by emailing it to [support@ashtoncollege.edu.au](mailto:support@ashtoncollege.edu.au).
- 4.2 Students must continue to attend classes while their appeal is being considered as their attendance and/or course progress will continue to be monitored during the appeal review process.
- 4.3 The student will not incur costs when accessing the internal appeals process unless they seek representation.
- 4.4 General appeals may be made in relation to the following areas:
  - the outcome of a formal complaint
  - the outcome of action being brought against the student for breaching the code of conduct
  - against the College's decision that it intends to report International Students for:
  - not achieving satisfactory course progress
  - not achieving satisfactory attendance
  - against the College's decision to defer, suspend or cancel an international student's enrolment
- 4.5 Students must have reasonable grounds for an appeal and include all supporting evidence with the Complaints & Appeals form.

- 4.6 The college delegate can assist students with completing the Complaints and Appeal form.
- 4.7 The college delegate is not able to assist students in establishing if they have reasonable grounds for an appeal.
- 4.8 Students' have the right to seek advice from and be represented by external parties at any time during the appeals process. The cost of this will be borne by the student.
- 4.9 If the appeal is lodged as a result of the outcome of a complaint, the staff members who dealt with the complaint will not handle the appeal.
- 4.10 Students must lodge an appeal within 20 working days of being notified by Ashton College of any decision they wish to appeal.
- 4.11 The appeals process will commence within 5 working days of lodgement and the outcome communicated to the student within 10 working days of lodgement. On receiving an appeal Ashton College will arrange a meeting to take place and inform the student in writing.
- 4.12 The student and representative (if requested), CEO, and two other appropriate members of staff will attend the meeting.
- 4.13 During the internal appeals process, the following will be taken into consideration:
  - Records of the written agreement between the student(s) and Ashton College;
  - Compliance of documentation with the National Code and Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislative framework;
  - Decisions are guided by Ashton College policies, the National Code, and ESOS legislative framework;
  - Any advisory received from the ESOS Policy Team.
- 4.14 Staff handling the appeal will give students every opportunity to present their case during this process and try to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of the student where possible.
- 4.15 Ashton staff will consider all the evidence and liaise with appropriate staff if necessary to ensure all the facts are considered prior to making any decision.
- 4.16 If appropriate college staff may seek advice from internal/ external Welfare Support services and/ or Academic staff.
- 4.17 College representatives will clarify evidence/ information to ensure they fully understand all aspects of the issue.
- 4.18 The evidence will be reviewed in an impartial manner in coming to a decision.
- 4.19 Minutes of the meeting will be taken including the outcome of the appeal. This will also include the reasons for the decision. The minutes will be signed by all present.
- 4.20 Ashton staff discusses the reasons for the decision with the appellant for rejecting the appeal or accepting it is justified.
- 4.21 If the outcome is in favour of the student the college delegate will immediately commence corrective action.
- 4.22 Students are posted and/or emailed written confirmation of the outcome the next business day. The letter details the reasons for the decision and informs the student of their right to access the external appeals process within 20 working days of receipt of the letter. Information on how to access this process is also provided.
- 4.23 The complaints and appeals are updated in Student Management System (SMS).
- 4.24 All evidence will be placed in the student's files.
- 4.25 There are no further avenues within Ashton College for complaints or appeals after the internal appeals process has been completed, however, an external appeals process is available to students.
- 4.26 Details of the external appeals process and how students may access it are outlined in section 6.

- 4.27 If an International Student lodges an external appeal against the college's decision of its intention to report the student for unsatisfactory course progress, unsatisfactory attendance, or defer, suspend or cancel their enrolment Ashton College will maintain the student's enrolment until the outcome of the external appeal is known.
- 4.28 In such cases the college will not take any action until the 20 days from sending a notification has expired or until the college has received written notification of the outcome from the Overseas Student Ombudsman if an external appeal is lodged.
- 4.29 Students may also seek legal redress through the usual court processes if they feel unsatisfied beyond the first external appeal. Costs of any legal redress by students are to be covered by the student.

## **5. Internal appeals process – Assessments**

- 5.1 The student will not incur costs when accessing the internal appeals process unless they seek representation.
- 5.2 If a student feels they have been unfairly assessed or there are circumstances that impacted their performance, they may appeal an assessment decision.
- 5.3 Students should approach their assessor in this case outlining the reasons for their appeal.
- 5.4 If the assessor feels there are reasonable grounds for the appeal, he/ she may decide to re-assess the student.
- 5.5 The assessor should document this process along with the outcome in the Student Management System (SMS). All supporting documentation should also be placed in the student's file.
- 5.6 If the assessor decides to refuse the student an opportunity for re-assessment, the student may lodge a formal appeal by submitting a complaint and appeal form. The student must provide reasons for the appeal along with any supporting evidence.
- 5.7 Students can complete & submit the Appeals form electronically on the feedback section of the Ashton College website or download the form from the 'form and policies' section, complete and email it to [support@ashtoncollege.edu.au](mailto:support@ashtoncollege.edu.au).
- 5.8 Students must continue to attend classes while their appeal is being considered as their attendance and/or course progress will continue to be monitored during the appeal review process.
- 5.9 If the appeal is in relation to the Academic Director's decision, the CEO will take over the handling of the appeal case.
- 5.10 If the Academic Director /CEO or other staff member handling the process decides that the student's appeal be upheld the following will apply:
- The assessment in question will be marked by a different trainer (or by a trainer from another RTO if appropriate and feasible) and the outcome communicated to the student.
  - The assessor should document this process along with the outcome in the complaints and appeals register. All supporting documentation should also be placed in the student's file.
  - The student will be sent written notification of the outcome within two working days of the decision being made. This will also include reasons and details for the decision. The letter will also inform the student of their right to access the external appeals process and how to do so.
- 5.11 Students can only appeal an assessment decision once.
- 5.12 If students are dissatisfied with the outcome of the internal appeals process, they may access the external appeals process. Details of this procedure and how to access it are outlined below in section 6.
- 5.13 Students may also seek legal redress through the usual court processes if they feel unsatisfied beyond the first external appeal. Costs of any legal redress by students are to be covered by the student.

## **6. External appeals process International Students**

- 6.1 External appeals may only be lodged if a student thinks Ashton College has not followed its

Complaints and Appeals policy and procedure, or they are still dissatisfied with the outcomes of complaints and/or appeals after going through the College's internal appeal process.

- 6.2 Students must continue to attend classes while their appeal is being considered as their attendance and/or course progress will continue to be monitored during the appeal review process.
- 6.3 International students should contact the Overseas Students Ombudsman for external complaints/appeals. The Overseas Students Ombudsman offers a free and independent service for overseas students who wish to appeal a decision after the conclusion of the internal complaints and appeals process. Further information can be obtained from the Overseas Students Ombudsman website <https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/> or phone 1300 362 072 for more information.
- 6.4 The Ombudsman is independent, and impartial and reviews complaint matters under standard 10 of the National Code 2018. If the internal or any external complaints handling, or appeal process results in a decision or recommendation in favour of the overseas student, Ashton College will immediately implement the decision or recommendation and/or take the preventive or corrective action required by the decision and advise the overseas student of that action.
- 6.5 During the external complaint review process, the following will be taken into consideration:
  - Records of the written agreement between the student(s) and Ashton College;
  - Compliance of documentation with the National Code and Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislative framework;
  - Decisions are guided by Ashton College policies, the National Code, and ESOS legislative framework;
  - Any advisory received from the ESOS Policy Team.
- 6.6 The Overseas Students Ombudsman will provide a statement of the final outcome to the student and Ashton College at the completion of the process.
- 6.7 If the outcome of the external appeals process results in a decision favouring the student, Ashton College will immediately implement any corrective action, decision, or measures required as indicated in the written response provided by the external appeals body. The student will be advised as to the course of action taken by Ashton College as per *The Overseas Students Ombudsman's* advice.
- 6.8 The student will be contacted within 3 working days of receiving notification from *the Overseas Students Ombudsman* of the decision.
- 6.9 Students will not incur costs in accessing the external appeals process.
- 6.10 All documentation will be placed in the student's file.
- 6.11 Ashton College's Complaints and Appeals policy in no way affects the students' rights to take action under the *Australian Consumer Law* if the *Australian Consumer Law* applies.

## 7. Domestic students

Domestic students also have the right to contact the VET regulator if they are dissatisfied with the complaints and appeals process and lodge a complaint against Ashton College.

- 7.1 External appeals may only be lodged if a student thinks Ashton College has not followed its Complaints and Appeals policy and procedure.
- 7.2 Students may access the external appeals process with ASQA. *Further information on ASQA can be found at* <http://www.asqa.gov.au/complaints/making-a-complaint.html>.
- 7.3 ASQA's processes require you to identify yourself to ASQA as a complainant, although you may request that your identity is kept confidential throughout any investigation that ASQA undertakes.
- 7.4 Ashton College's Complaints and Appeals policy in no way affects the students' rights to take action under the *Australian Consumer Law* if the *Australian Consumer Law* applies.
- 7.5 All communications are stored in the student file and Student Management System is updated.

## Revision History:

All versions are maintained in OneDrive.