

Complaints and feedback policy

1. PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

The Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) is committed to creating a culture that encourages feedback and complaints, with the view to learn from complaints.

As an organisation and as individuals we should always be seeking to improve the service we offer. One of the best measures of the effectiveness of our work is feedback (including complaints and compliments) given by the people we serve.

Through proper evaluation of the feedback we receive, we can gauge what we are doing well, what areas need to be improved and can evaluate suggestions for improvement that we may not have considered.

The emphasis for complaint handling in VIT is on problem solving and improving our services, not assigning blame.

This policy aims to

- put in place an open and transparent complaint handling system
- specify the key performance indicators to which we will hold ourselves accountable
- establish timeframes for resolving complaints
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of staff
- ensure staff handle complaints fairly and objectively
- set out how staff record and analyse complaint data to identify where we can improve services.

The policy has been drafted based on the learnings from the Victorian Ombudsman guide to complaints: *Good Practice for Public Sector Agencies (September 2016)*.

Guiding principles

This policy is based on seven principles.

1. Commitment

We are committed to resolving complaints and have a culture that recognises an individual's right to complain.

We value complaints and recognise them as being part of our business of serving our communities and improving service delivery.

2. Accessibility

People with a range of needs can easily complain and staff actively assist them to navigate the complaints process.

3. Transparency

We make it clear how to complain, where to complain and how the complaint will be handled. The steps taken to respond to a complaint are recorded and will stand up to scrutiny.

4. Objectivity and fairness

Complaints are dealt with courteously, impartially, within established timeframes and are assessed on merit.

5. Privacy

Complaint information is handled according to privacy laws and other relevant legislation. We provide clear information about how we handle personal information.

Complaint data is de-identified if reported on more widely.

6. Accountability

We are accountable internally and externally for our decision making and complaint handling performance. We provide explanations and reasons for decisions and ensure that our decisions are subject to appropriate review processes.

7. Continuous improvement

Acting on, learning from and using complaint data helps us identify problems and improve services.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all VIT staff. It also applies to third party contractors carrying out services on VIT's behalf.

3. DEFINITIONS

TERM	DEFINITION
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction with the quality of an action taken, decision made, or service provided by a VIT or its contractor, or a delay or failure in providing a service, taking an action, or making a decision by a VIT or its contractor.
Frontline staff	Includes any VIT staff member who receives a complaint directly. These are predominately staff from Teacher Engagement and Registration (TER), Stakeholder Engagement and Communications (SEC), and Conduct and Compliance (CC) branches.

4. STATEMENT OF POLICY

HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

A person can make a complaint in a number of ways.

Mail	Victorian Institute of Teaching Feedback and Complaints PO BOX 531 Collins Street West VIC 8007
Telephone	1300 888 067
Email	feedback@vit.vic.edu.au
In person	Complaints Manager Level 9 628 Bourke Street Melbourne VIC 3000
Internet	www.vit.vic.edu.au/forms-and-publications/forms/feedback/

ACCESSIBILITY

Anyone who has been affected by a decision or action (including a failure to make a decision or take action) can make a complaint.

We accept and respond to anonymous complaints, provided we have received enough information to do so.

COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE

We take a four-tiered approach to complaint handling

Frontline resolution: frontline staff who receive complaints directly from the public will assess and resolve the complaint immediately, if possible.

All serious complaints, regardless of whether they are resolved quickly will be reported to SEC Manager (in their capacity as Complaints Manager) for recording in Complaints register.

- 1. Investigation, if required:** if frontline staff cannot easily resolve the complaint, they will refer it to the SEC Manager (in their capacity as Complaints Manager) and / or their branch Director for investigation and resolution.
- 2. Internal review:** if the complainant is aggrieved with the process or outcome of the frontline resolution or investigation, they can request an internal review.
- 3. Access to external review:** if the complainant is aggrieved with the process or outcome of the internal review, we inform them of any available external review options.

PROCEDURES

Frontline resolution

- we will acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days of receipt
- frontline staff will receive the complaint
- frontline staff will clarify the complaint and the outcome the complainant is seeking
- frontline staff will assess the complaint to determine how it should be dealt with
- if VIT is not the right organisation to respond to the complaint, frontline staff will advise the complainant of an organisation that may be able to help.

Investigation

- if frontline staff cannot resolve the complaint, or it is a serious / complex complaint, it will be assigned to SEC Manager (Complaints Manager) and / or relevant branch Director, if necessary, for investigation
- the person responsible for handling the complaint will advise the complainant who the contact person is and how long it will take to respond to the complaint
- the person responsible for handling the complaint will aim to resolve all complaints within 28 days
- if it takes longer than 28 days to resolve a complaint, the person responsible for handling the complaint will contact the complainant prior to or at this time and explain why
- complaints that are not resolved within 28 days may be escalated if necessary to ensure that a resolution is expedited
- the person handling the complaint will write to the complainant to advise them of the outcome (including reasons for the decision made and their contact information)
- the person handling the complaint may contact the complainant to discuss the outcome of their complaint prior to sending the outcome email / letter
- in most cases, the person responsible for handling the complaint will be the SEC Manager or relevant branch Director, if necessary (under exceptional circumstances, other SEC staff members may be required to handle the complaint).

Internal review

The SEC Manager will be responsible for internal reviews unless the SEC Branch was involved in the original decision.

A relevant branch Director will be responsible for internal reviews for cases where the SEC Branch was involved in the original decision.

Regular communication (every 4 weeks), will be provided to the complainant until the internal review has concluded.

An outcome letter signed by the SEC Manager and / or relevant branch Director will be provided to the complainant at the conclusion of every internal review.

The outcome letter will advise the complainant of any avenues of external review available in relation to the matter, such as the Victorian Ombudsman.

Complaints about contractors

We recognise that VIT retains a level of responsibility for services carried out by contractors on our behalf.

Contractors will respond to the complaint directly.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint, he or she can ask VIT to review the decision.

All outcome letters written by contractors in relation to complaints will include the name and contact details of the Complaints Manager to whom the complainant may escalate their complaint if they are not satisfied with the outcome provided by the contractor.

Remedies

Where we have found that VIT has made an error, we will take steps to redress the situation. Possible remedies include, but are not limited to

- an explanation of why the error occurred and the steps taken to prevent it happening again
- a reversal of a decision
- an ex-gratia payment or compensation
- disciplinary action taken against a staff member
- providing the means of redress requested by the complainant.

Where we identify an error, we will consider offering a genuine apology to the complainant, in addition to any other remedies offered, irrespective of whether the complainant specifically requests this.

Privacy

When gathering information to respond to a complaint, we will only

- use it to deal with the complaint or to address systemic issues arising from the complaint
- disclose it in a de-identified format when disclosing data to the public
- share it with staff on a need-to-know basis.

Recording complaints

All serious or complex complaints are recorded in our VIT complaints register.

We analyse our complaint data and provide reports to VIT council on how we can reduce complaints and improve services. Senior management is responsible for acting on the recommendations in these reports.

We record the following information for each complaint

- the complainant's details
- how the complaint was received
- a description of the complaint
- the complainant's desired outcome (if known)
- VIT officer responsible for handling the complaint
- any action taken, including contact with the complainant, response times and the outcome
- when the complaint was finalised
- any recommendations for improvement, and who is responsible for implementing them.

Any queries regarding the recording of complaints should be directed to the SEC Manager.

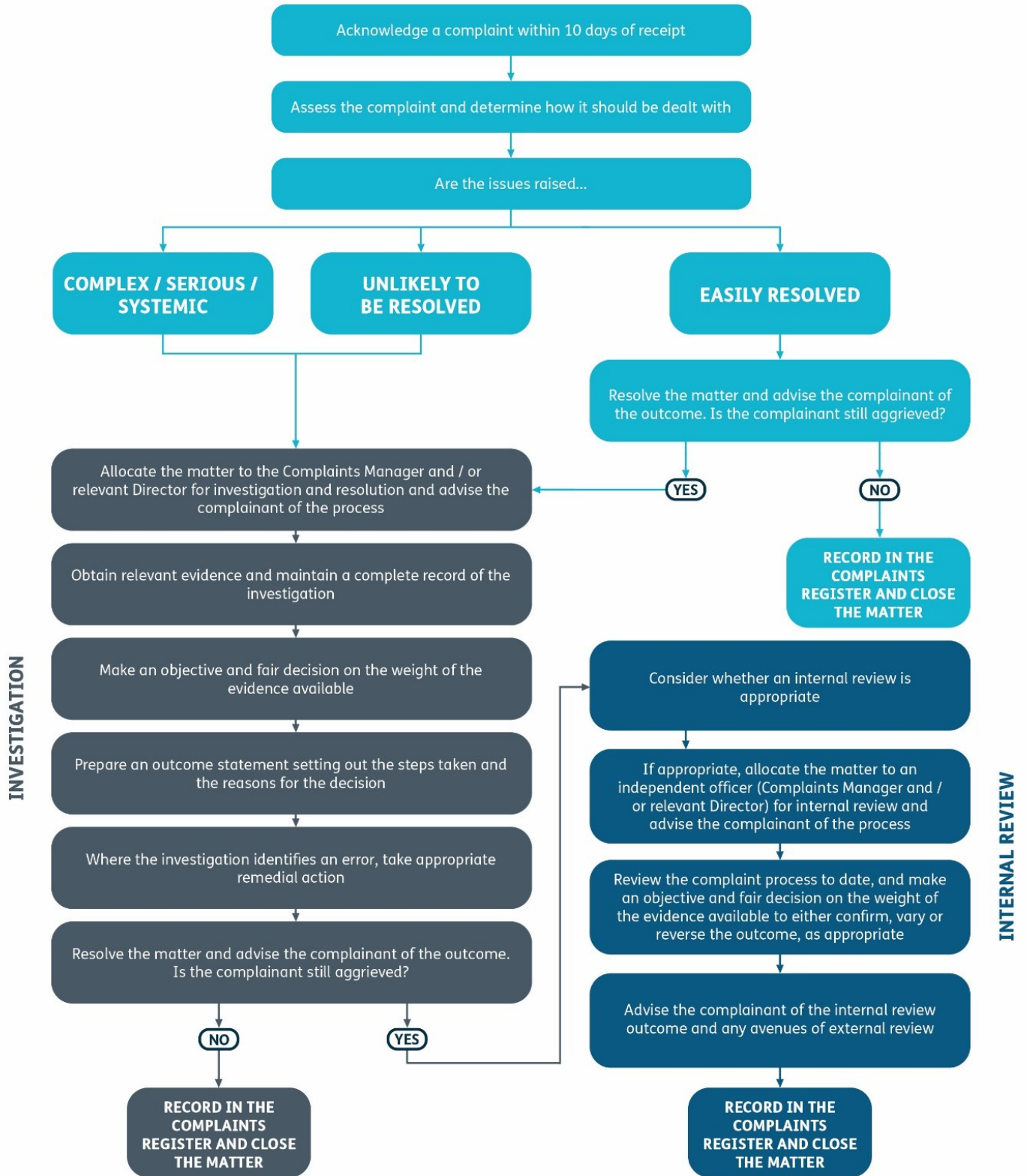
Reporting on performance

To measure our performance, we have the following key performance indicators

- complaints upheld, partially upheld, not upheld
- performance against timelines set by VIT (i.e. average time to respond)
- number of changes made to services as a result of complaints
- number of complaint outcomes overturned on internal review
- customer satisfaction with the complaint handling system
- complaints escalated to the Victorian Ombudsman's office where VIT's original decision has been overturned and / or proposals for action have been made by the Ombudsman

COMPLAINT HANDLING FLOWCHART

FRONTLINE RESOLUTION



Complainants should be advised of their right to complain to the Victorian Ombudsman

The Victorian Ombudsman can receive complaints about the administrative actions of state government agencies and councils

EXTERNAL REVIEW

5. RELATED LEGISLATION AND POLICY

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Freedom of information Act 1982*
- *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011*
- *Privacy and Data protection Act 2014*
- *Protected Disclosure Act 2012*
- VPS employee code of conduct