

GRIEVANCES, COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS POLICY AND PROCEDURES [ACADEMIC] VET

Purpose

This procedure describes the process by which all Southern School of Natural Therapies (SSNT) students may have problems of an academic nature addressed effectively, efficiently, professionally and confidentially.

Scope

This policy and procedure applies to all persons enrolled with or seeking enrolment with the SSNT for the delivery of education, training and assessment services, (approved courses and units of study) including those who are or would be entitled to FEE-HELP or VET FEE-HELP assistance under clause 43 of schedule 1A of the Higher Education Support Act 2003 and clause 45(1).

Students of the SSNT are entitled to use the grievance procedures set out in this policy, regardless of the location of the campus of the school at which the grievance has arisen, the student's place of residence or the mode in which they study. This procedure is free of charge.

Related References and Standards

This procedure relates to the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) standards, (for students and persons seeking entitlement to VET FEE-HELP assistance) and the Australian Quality Training Framework Standards (AQTF 2007) (2.6) or any other responsibilities under statute or any other law.

Responsible parties

The Principal is responsible for the control and issue of this procedure. This revised procedure has been ratified and agreed to by the SSNT School Council on the 1st April, 2009.

Availability

All students and prospective students will be provided access to the SSNT's Grievance Policies and Procedures via the school website, www.southernschool.com and the SSNT's Alf Jacka library. It is also referenced in the Lecturers' Procedures Manual to inform staff of the procedures and their application.

Definitions

An academic grievance, complaint or appeal is deemed to be dissatisfaction with the procedures, outcomes or the quality of service provided by employees of the SSNT in relation to the following processes:

- enrollment
- education and training delivery, curriculum
- exams and assessments, a training/competency assessment, recognition of prior learning
- student progress
- issuing of results, testamurs and/or statements of attainment and awards
- any other activities associated with the delivery of education, training and assessment

Grievances of a non-academic nature, such as related to privacy or personal information, discrimination or harassment are dealt with under the *Grievances, Complaints and Appeals [Non-Academic] Policy and Procedure*.

An academic grievance, complaint or appeal is deemed to be a formal grievance, complaint or appeal when it is lodged in writing to SSNT. Forms for this purpose are available at the library or on the website.

Academic Appeals Committee

The Academic Appeals committee meets as necessary and reports to the Academic Board. It includes the following people, where no conflict of interest arises:

- Chairperson of Council or nominee
- 1 Council member nominated by Council
- Principal or nominee
- Manager, Student Services
- Student representative (not involved in the decision which is being appealed) nominated by the student body
- A Head of Department not involved in the decision which is being appealed.
- Meetings Convenor (Secretary) [non-voting]

The chairperson is elected from the membership. A quorum is four voting members. The committee may call appropriate persons to give evidence e.g. relevant lecturers, coordinators or heads of department.

Student Representation

The person making the claim (claimant) and /or respondent have the right to be represented by a third person of their choice, (such as a family member, friend, counselor, or other professional support member.) if they so desire.

Policy

All disputes or grievances will be handled professionally and confidentially in order to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

All parties will have a clear understanding of the 3 steps involved in the grievance procedure.

Each appellant/complainant will be provided with the opportunity to present his or her case at each stage of the grievance process.

All grievances will be managed fairly and equitably and as efficiently as possible - in a timely manner.

The complainant and respondent will not be victimised or discriminated against in any of the stages set out in this policy, nor as a result of a grievance being raised.

The SSNT will encourage the parties to approach a grievance with an open view and attempt to resolve issues through discussion and conciliation. The policy provides an avenue for most grievances to be addressed. However, where a grievance cannot be resolved through discussion and conciliation internally, the SSNT acknowledges the need for an appropriate external and independent agent to moderate between the parties, as set out below under Procedure.

SSNT will endeavour to resolve any grievance referred to it by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) within ten working days of its receipt of the complaint.

This policy is communicated to academic and support staff through the Lecturers' Procedures Manual and the school's website. The heads of departments are responsible for the training of academic staff in their respective departments in the application of the policy. The Manager-Student Services, Cheryl Richter is responsible for the training of student services/administration staff in its application.

At all stages of the process, the complainant and/or respondent have the right to be represented by a third person (such as a family member, friend, counsellor or other professional support person) if they so desire.

At all stages of the process, discussions relating to complaints, grievances and appeals are to be recorded in writing. Reasons and a full explanation in writing for decisions and

actions taken as part of the procedures will be given, if requested by the complainant and/or respondent.

Student Privacy

The SSNT acknowledges and respects the privacy of students. It is required under the Privacy Act 1988 (Cwth) to comply with the *national Information Privacy Principles* in respect of the collection, use and disclosure of personal information from individuals. (Refer to the SSNT *Privacy Statement and Policy* available on the website, www.southernschool.com or at the Alf Jacka library; and the *Personal Information Procedures*.)

Records of all grievances, applications for review of decisions and outcomes of the grievance process will be kept securely for a period of five years. These records will be strictly confidential and filed in a separate file (not kept on the student or staff file) and stored in the office of the Deputy Principal for a period of five years. Parties to the complaint will be allowed supervised access to these records at the discretion of the Principal, Deputy Principal or nominee.

Grievance Procedures

Students enrolled in any accredited course of the SSNT have access to a three stage academic grievance process which is set out below.

Each stage is free of charge.

Stage 1

- a) Initially, complaints and grievances should be discussed with the *person/s involved*.
- b) If this is impracticable or unsatisfactory, students should communicate with one of the staff listed below.

The *head* of the appropriate department:

Chinese Medicine, David Benn

Myotherapy and Physical Therapies, Brian Tritton

Naturopathy, Susan Buckle

Sciences, Dr George Kweifio-Okai

Manager, Student Services, Cheryl Richter or

Deputy Principal, Dr John Porter.

A complaint made in writing will be considered a formal complaint. The 'Complaint, Grievances and Appeals Form' is available at the library or the student administration.

The complaint, decisions made and/or actions in relation to the matter will be documented. A resolution will be sought within 14 days of receipt of the complaint.

Stage 2

The second stage of the academic grievance process is as follows:

If dissatisfied with the response to the complaint or the time taken to resolve the matter under Stage 1, the student may submit the complaint/grievance in writing (on the available Form) to the *Principal* to address, who may explicitly seek the involvement of the *Academic Appeals & Grievances Committee*, within a reasonable time, normally within 30 days of receipt of the complaint. The decision or actions will be documented and the outcome will be given in writing to the complainant.

Stage 3

The third stage of the grievance process is as follows:

If the student/complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the *Principal /Academic Appeals Committee*, in stage 2, the complainant may request that the matter be referred to an *external dispute resolution process*, by the body appointed by the SSNT for that purpose.

The details of this external body and contact person are as follows:

Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET)
Executive Officer, Victoria
PO Box 551
East Melbourne
Vic 8002
Tel: 03 - 9416 1355

This final stage will be addressed within 30 days.

If ACPET makes recommendations in relation to a grievance they have reviewed, ACPET will forward these recommendations within 14 days to the Principal or his delegate who will ensure that the recommendations are implemented within 21 days.

Note

The procedures set out in this document do not replace or modify procedures or any other responsibilities which may arise under other higher education or VET provider policies or under statute or any other law.