

# FAIR TREATMENT, EQUAL BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES POLICY AND PROCEDURES

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## Related References

- Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA)
- VET FEE-HELP Guidelines
- VET Provider Guidelines, issued by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

## Related Standards

- AQTF 2007 *Condition of Registration 3, Compliance with Legislation and*
- AQTF 2007 *Standards 1.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.6 and 3.1.*

## Purpose

This procedure describes how SSNT ensures fairness, review and equity in its scope of operations. The SSNT's policy is to treat all students fairly with equal benefits and opportunities, including its application processes. It has open, fair and transparent procedures.

## Scope of Procedure

This procedure applies to all persons enrolled, seeking enrolment and those employed or contracted to SSNT, particularly those in the school's student/administration services.

## Responsible Authority

The Principal is responsible for the school's compliance with these requirements.

## POLICY STATEMENT

As a Registered Training Organization (RTO), the SSNT reviews and provides continuous improvement in all of its services and it abides by the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Standards and Conditions of Registration and other legislative requirements.

The SSNT has open, fair and transparent procedures that are based on merit for making decisions about the selection of students who seek to enroll in a subject or course at SSNT.

Students are treated fairly with equal benefits and opportunities.

The SSNT makes its procedures publicly known and publishes them on its website at [www.southernschool.com](http://www.southernschool.com) under Student Centre.

The offer of accredited training services requires SSNT to meet quality standards of student services and support. These services are delivered at pre-enrolment, enrolment and during the progress of training.

At pre-enrolment, prospective students are informed of their rights and obligations as students of SSNT.

Student selection processes are documented and implemented in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. These processes are underpinned by SSNT's diversity strategy and its own policies and procedures governing student selection, as set out below.

Students are not discriminated against on social, cultural, language, literacy, age, sex, religious, physical or other matters.

SSNT lays down in its Code of Practice, all responsibilities to its students for the conduct of education services and provides access to this document under student centre on the website ([www.southernschool.com](http://www.southernschool.com)) or on request of a hardcopy.

The SSNT promotes information in the student handbook/ diary and on the website about its policies and procedures, to assure the quality of education services provided to prospective and current students.

SSNT complies with and promotes its responsibilities with all relevant laws and regulations on matters of :

- occupational health and safety
- workplace harassment, victimisation and bullying
- antidiscrimination, including equal opportunity, racial vilification, disability discrimination
- vocational education and training
- privacy
- disability
- copyright
- protection of students' fees paid in advance.

SSNT provides additional support and welfare services or refers students to external agencies where personal difficulties are impacting on their training progress.

SSNT implements strategies and processes as appropriate, to assist with the identification of students/learners needs and it develops programs of learning that are relevant to diverse groups of students/learners, or refers to external agencies, as may be required.

## **Fair Treatment**

The SSNT treats fairly all of its students. This applies to those who are, or who would be, entitled to VET FEE-HELP assistance and all of the persons seeking to enroll in a VET unit of study that meets the SSNT course requirements and who are, or would be entitled to VET FEE-HELP assistance under clause 43 of Schedule 1A of the Act.

Specifically the fairness requirements include:

- fair treatment
- equal benefits and opportunities
- student grievance procedures
- student review procedures
- requirements to appoint review officers
- personal information procedures
- tuition assurance

The application of fair treatment does not require that all students are treated the same. Fairness must be considered in the context of all the relevant circumstances. There will be situations in

which the fair treatment of students may result in students in varying circumstances being treated differently, particularly with regard to VET FEE-HELP.

The SSNT publishes these fairness procedures and makes them publicly available on its website and in the student's handbook/diary.

## **Equal Benefits and Opportunities**

The SSNT has open, fair and transparent procedures that, in its reasonable view, are based on merit for making decisions about students undertaking, and persons applying for, courses.

This includes:

- The selection, from among the persons who are, or would be, entitled to VET FEE-HELP assistance under clause 43 of Schedule 1A of the Act and who seek to enrol with the SSNT in a VET unit of study that meets the requirements (under subclause 45 (1) of Schedule 1A of the Act) of persons to enrol; and
- The treatment of students who are, or who would be, entitled to VET FEE-HELP assistance under clause 43 of Schedule 1A of the Act undertaking a VET course of study.

*Refer below to 'Selection Procedures'.*

### **Application of merit**

The application of merit in decision-making processes involves the SSNT considering each application on a case by case basis and not applying inflexible policies that preclude eligible applicants from having their application considered.

### **No income test**

The SSNT does not apply an income test when making decisions about which students are eligible for enrolment or for VET FEE-HELP assistance.

The SSNT also protects students' fees paid in advance. The SSNT is a financial member of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) and is a member of the ACPET Australian Student Tuition Assurance Scheme (ASTAS) for fee protection purposes.

### **Educational disadvantage**

When making decisions about the selection of students, the SSNT takes educational disadvantages that a particular student has experienced into account, including consideration of the actual disadvantages that a particular student has experienced.

The SSNT does not use 'proxy indicators' of educational disadvantage in the absence of clear evidence that all students in such a group necessarily suffered educational disadvantage. Such proxy indicators are not used because they assume that all people who satisfy the proxy condition (eg. being from a low income group or being from a rural area) have necessarily experienced educational disadvantage. The SSNT considers a particular student's specific circumstances before making a decision about whether the student has actually suffered educational disadvantage.

### **Restricted access arrangement**

When making decisions about the selection of students, the SSNT takes into account students that are enrolled under a restricted access arrangement, as appropriate. (This is an agreement entered into between SSNT and an employer or industry body for the provision of a course(s) or places in a course(s) in which enrolment is limited or restricted to employees of the employer or industry body.)

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Pre-enrolment**

All potential students are provided with information, including a course brochure that details the accredited course, code, units of study and vocational outcomes. Brochures are accompanied by general course information (or details of access through SSNT website) providing:

- selection processes
- course content and outcomes
- fees, charges and refund policy
- fair treatment, equal benefits and opportunities processes
- provision for language, literacy and numeracy assistance
- learning support arrangements
- learning strategies and methods
- welfare and guidance services
- grievances, complaints and appeals processes
- disciplinary processes
- SSNT approach to access and equity
- Skills recognition processes
- privacy requirements

References are made to SSNT Policies and Procedures which are available on the website under Student Centre and in the school handbook/diary including, amongst others:

- Fair Treatment, Equal Benefits and Opportunities Policy and Procedures
- Grievances, Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedures
- Student Review Procedures and requirements to appoint review officers
- Privacy Statement and Policy which includes personal information procedures
- Withdrawal and Refund Policy and Procedures; and
- Reference to membership of the Australian Student Tuition Assurance Scheme (ASTAS) for fee protection purposes.

Prospective student enquiries are directed to the administration officer/reception staff who have the appropriate course knowledge. Prospective students are encouraged to attend Information Sessions or to discuss with the administration officer or Manager-Student Services, details specific to intending VET students (see above).

Information Sessions are scheduled throughout the education year, and offer prospective students information concerning the above. Course applicants are interviewed.

Prospective students unable to attend information sessions (ie. regional and country) are encouraged to discuss their enrolment application with the Administration Officer or Manager-Student Services and to make an interview time to meet with the relevant Head of Department (HOD).

### **Applications**

Applicants for full time study should apply through VTAC (Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre) which facilitates applications to study at Victorian tertiary institutions and collects the documentation required. Full-time means they intend to take every subject listed for their first semester.

Part-time students should apply direct to the school.

After the final VTAC deadline, applications should be made direct to the school. The SSNT is obliged to give VTAC applicants first preference for places.

Refer to the SSNT website for prospective students for current application dates, course codes and details. <http://www.southernschool.com/html/student-centre/prospective-students.php>

### **Offers**

The SSNT Selection Officer will access the list of applicants over the web, once they are collated by VTAC. At that stage, students who have already been interviewed by SSNT will be eligible for selection. (Students are advised to organize an interview at an early stage directly with student services at SSNT.) Students who have not been interviewed may be made an offer subject to interview.

The offer is considered to be accepted once the applicant completes a Southern School Registration form.

### **Deferral policy**

VTAC applicants may defer their offer of a place until the following year. They would still go through the normal interview and registration process, then send in a letter of deferral, together with a completed Registration form and deposit.

### **Fair Selection Process**

Selection is undertaken in a fair and transparent manner, based on a demonstration of ability to successfully participate in the study program and the completion of any prerequisites that may apply to a course or subject/unit of study. This is demonstrated through VCE scores and interview. Students are not compromised on social, cultural, language, literacy, sex, religious, physical or other status. The SSNT has equal benefits and opportunities processes.

Adult student/learner applicants are required to demonstrate readiness for a return to study or capabilities based on prior learning. All applicants are interviewed and may be required to provide some written responses to questions.

Students who are returning to study or who may have learning difficulties are considered for a 'graduated entry', where a reduced study load may be offered. This is to be arranged by the administration officer in conjunction with the relevant Head of Department (HOD).

Where applicants do not have the prerequisites for course entry, as stated in the course information, they may be offered an alternative course more appropriate to their current skill level.

*Course fees* are finalised on enrolment and subject selection.

### **Recognition**

The SSNT has mutual recognition processes for credit transfer where students have completed equivalent studies with other RTOs. It also has processes for recognising work and life experiences which are relevant to competencies to be undertaken in a course of study.

Any queries concerning selection procedures, prerequisites, recognition, policies and procedures should be directed to the student services and the SSNT website, [www.southernschool.com](http://www.southernschool.com).

### **Enrolment**

All candidates are notified in writing of their application result. Appeals may be lodged in writing to the Principal and are dealt with under the SSNT's '*Grievances, Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedures*'.

### **Induction/Orientation**

All enrolled students are offered an orientation program. This is to confirm responsibilities and to provide further information regarding student services, facilities, vocational services, policies and procedures and SSNT resources. Students who are unable to attend orientation sessions are directed to the administration officer or Manager-Student Services and the SSNT web site for further information.

Students are issued with a current Handbook/Diary summarising SSNT processes (policies and procedures) course information, and student responsibilities.

Any queries concerning selection procedures and prerequisites should be directed to the student services and the website, [www.southernschool.com](http://www.southernschool.com).

The SSNT does not consider in the selection of students for its courses, the manner in which the student intends to pay for the course fees.

### **Student Grievance Procedures**

The SSNT has student grievance procedures for dealing with complaints about academic and non-academic matters by students and persons who seek to enroll with the school.

The SSNT addresses complaints and appeals efficiently and effectively and makes publicly available its student grievance procedures. Refer to the student's handbook/diary and the website: <http://www.southernschool.com/html/student-centre/policies-procedure/index.php>

The student grievance procedures required under VET FEE-HELP are in addition to other requirements or responsibilities that the SSNT has in place. There are grievance procedures for both Academic and Non-Academic matters.

#### **Academic matters**

Academic matters include those matters which relate to student progress, assessment, curriculum and awards in a course.

**Refer to SSNT's 'Grievances, Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedures – Academic'.**

#### **Non-academic matters**

Non-academic matters include those matters which do not relate to student progress, assessment, curriculum and awards in a course and include complaints in relation to personal information that the SSNT holds in relation to the student. Non-academic grievances can arise from events occurring or from decisions made by SSNT and cover issues such as financial matters, fines and payments, application procedures, exclusions from events and facilities, harassment, vilification, discrimination, and the use or misuse of personal information.

**Refer to SSNT's 'Grievances, Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedures - Non-Academic'.**

#### **Requirements**

The SSNT has arrangements for handling complaints that:

- are easily accessible to students
- are provided at no cost, or at a reasonable cost and which encourage timely resolution of complaints
- include provision for independent internal investigation of complaints which remain unresolved
- include provision for external review of decisions made following any internal investigation and a mechanism for considering any recommendations arising from external review
- are complete, unambiguous and are agreed to and ratified by the SSNT School Council
- do not discriminate or victimise
- are communicated to staff who are trained in their application
- specify reasonable timelines for responses
- allow third party representation

- if requested, provide reasons and a full explanation in writing of decisions and actions taken
- require confidential accurate records of all grievances to be kept for at least 5 years.

Students or those persons seeking to enroll with SSNT are entitled to access the student grievance procedures, regardless of the location of the campus at which the grievance has arisen, the student's place of residence or the mode in which they study.

### **Privacy complaints and advice**

Student grievance procedures extend to complaints about breaches of personal information by the SSNT (including its officers, employees and those who perform services by or on behalf of the SSNT) and relating to information obtained for the purposes of VET FEE-HELP assistance and repayment of HELP loans. Refer to the website for the detailed Privacy Policy and below, *Privacy and Personal Information Policy and Procedures*.

## **Applications and Student Review Procedures (reviewable decisions)**

### **Applications**

Applications for VET FEE-HELP should be made on the appropriate application form. **The Manager, Student Services, Ms Cheryl Richter is the contact person for VET FEE-HELP.** Any queries or initial requests for a change must be made in writing, directed to the Manager-Student Services, clearly stating the reasons for the requested change and including all relevant documentation.

### **Review**

A person has the right to apply for a review of a decision by SSNT to not re-credit or remit their FEE-HELP balance (reviewable decisions). The SSNT has student review procedures for reconsidering such decisions. Students should submit a valid request for review in writing, including the required content, clearly stating the reasons. The SSNT provides details of letters or required content of the letters that providers are required to send to a person who has requested the review of a decision to not re-credit or remit their FEE-HELP balance.

A request for a formal review of the decision made should be directed to the Principal, Mr Colin Thomson, who is the person who can review decisions.

The SSNT must acknowledge receipt of an application for review of a decision in writing, and inform the applicant that, if the reviewer has not advised the applicant of a decision within 45 days of receiving the application for review, the reviewer is taken to have confirmed the original decision.

The SSNT makes publicly available its *VET FEE-HELP Student Review Policy and Procedures* on the website, <http://www.southernschool.com/html/student-centre/policies-procedure/index.php>.

## **Privacy - Personal Information Procedures**

The SSNT complies with the information privacy principles relating to information obtained for the purposes of VET FEE-HELP assistance. The SSNT has a personal information procedure under the privacy requirements which allows students to apply for and receive information that the SSNT holds about them.

Refer to the *SSNT Privacy Policy* available on the website and available at the student services /administration reception.

<http://www.southernschool.com/html/student-centre/policies-procedure/index.php>

This policy does not permit the disclosure of a student's personal information to a third party without specific, written, signed instruction by the student in specific circumstances.

### **VET Fee Requirements**

The SSNT complies with the regulatory requirements and applies them fairly to all students.

These include:

- determining tuition fees
- schedules of tuition fees
- fees related to units, courses or matters or things for which fees may be charged.

### **Tuition Assurance – VET**

The SSNT protects students' fees paid in advance. To fulfill this purpose, the SSNT is a current financial member of the **Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET)** and is a member of its **Australian Student Tuition Assurance Scheme (ASTAS)** for students' fee protection.