

COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

1. OBJECTIVE

The Complaints Handling Policy outlines ACARA's approach to handling external complaints and supports a culture of openness to feedback from our stakeholders by providing transparent and accessible complaints handling processes.

This policy aligns with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's [Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling](#) and should be read in conjunction with ACARA's Complaints Handling Procedure.

2. POLICY CATEGORY

Core All ACARA employees, affiliates and contractors are expected to be aware of, understand and know where to locate this policy.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all formal external complaints about ACARA services and ways of doing business. The policy is core to all ACARA employees, affiliates and contractors, including staff who receive, manage and/or investigate formal external complaints about ACARA.

Complaints relating to decisions made by courts or tribunals are not within the scope of this policy. In addition, ACARA will not accept or action complaints relating to matters that are very old (and cannot be readily investigated), have been previously dealt with or finalised, are outside its jurisdiction, or are vexatious or frivolous.

Complaints from ACARA employees or their representatives are managed in accordance with ACARA's Grievance Resolution Policy (2018). Public interest disclosures by ACARA staff or service providers (including former staff or service providers) are managed in accordance with ACARA's Public Interest Disclosures Policy and associated *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013* Principal Officer's procedures.

4. STATEMENT

ACARA is committed to providing a high-quality complaints handling process that is modelled on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency and integration with core business. ACARA maintains respect for complainants' privacy and uses feedback to improve ACARA's services.

4.1. Complaints

Complaints are defined as any expression of dissatisfaction or grievance made to staff by a complainant in writing in relation to ACARA business, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected. For the avoidance of doubt, this excludes disagreements about the Education Council or government policy positions. For the purpose of this policy, complaints are those registered as formal complaints in accordance with this policy.

4.2. Complaints handling principles

Fairness: ACARA deals with complaints impartially, handles complaints confidentially, and provides a transparent process that keeps complainants advised of the progress and provides an opportunity for response and to seek internal review.

Accessibility: ACARA ensures that information about how to make a complaint is freely available, provides a variety of ways to make a complaint, and takes steps to remove barriers to making a complaint.

Responsiveness: ACARA observes the needs of vulnerable clients, providing assistance when required, and manages unreasonable complainant behaviour professionally.

Efficiency: ACARA aspires to resolve complaints as quickly as possible, incorporates regular internal reporting mechanisms to ensure escalation of unresolved complaints, if necessary, and provides staff with complaints handling policy and procedure to ensure quality management processes.

Integration: ACARA integrates complaints handling with core business and cooperates with other agencies, when required, to deal promptly with complaints.

4.3. How to make a complaint to ACARA

Formal complaints may be made to ACARA in writing, including via email to info@acara.edu.au or by post to:

Board Secretary
ACARA
Level 13, Centennial Plaza
280 Elizabeth Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Complaints will be managed in accordance with ACARA's Complaints Handling Procedure.

4.4. Commonwealth Ombudsman

The Commonwealth Ombudsman provides assurance that Australian Government entities act with integrity and treat people fairly. The Commonwealth Ombudsman can assess complaints about the actions of Australian agencies to see if these actions are wrong, unjust, unlawful, discriminatory or unfair, and recommends that a complaint is made to the relevant agency before approaching the Ombudsman's office. Information about the Ombudsman's

role and making a complaint via the Commonwealth Ombudsman is available on the [Ombudsman's website](#).

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1. All ACARA employees, affiliates and contractors

All ACARA employees, affiliates and contractors are responsible for reading and understanding this policy and the associated ACARA Complaints Handling Procedure.

5.2. Office of the CEO – policy owner

In addition to the requirements for employees, affiliates and contractors, the Office of the CEO is responsible for:

- management of this policy for currency with ACARA's business needs
- procedural actions as detailed in ACARA Complaints Handling Procedure document
- provision of a point of contact for anyone seeking information or advice about this policy.

5.3. ACARA Executive Leadership Team

Members of ACARA's Executive Leadership Team are responsible for the review and approval of this policy.

5.4. ACARA's Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

The ACARA CEO is responsible for ensuring compliance with, and the implementation of, this policy.

5.5. A complainant

A complainant is responsible for providing information as requested by ACARA's officers, clarifying information provided, where necessary, and interacting with ACARA in a helpful way that is conducive to resolving a complaint.

6. RELATED LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND AGREEMENTS

6.1. Legislation

Freedom of Information Act 1982

Privacy Act 1988

Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013

6.2. Policies

ACARA Public Interest Disclosure Policy

7. RELATED PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

7.1. Procedures (mandatory)


- ACARA Complaints Handling Procedure
- ACARA PID Act Principal Officer's procedures

8. IMPLEMENTATION

Staff will be made aware of their responsibilities under this policy via:

- all-staff meetings
- ACARA staff e-news
- broadcast emails
- emails to targeted groups
- targeted training.

9. POLICY ADMINISTRATION

Policy owner	Board Secretary, Office of the CEO
Review frequency	Every three years or in response to changes in ACARA's operating environment or business requirements
Approved by	 David de Carvalho Chief Executive Officer
Date	30 June 2020

10. VERSION HISTORY

Version	Date	Amendment	Author
1.0	11/2010	Version 1.0	Board Secretary

1.1	04/2011	Version 1.1	Board Secretary
1.2	04/2014	Version 1.2 rewrite	Board Secretary
2.0	01/2017	Version 2.0	Board Secretary
3.0	18/02/2020	Version 3.0 updated to current template, alignment to Better practice guide to complaint handling strengthened, procedural elements in responsibilities removed	Christine Roach Board Secretary