# Student and Public Complaints Policy

## Section 1 - Purpose

(1) The Student and Public Complaints Policy provides a framework for fair and equitable processes which enable concerns by students, prospective students, former students and members of the public to be addressed as quickly as possible and at a level as close to the source of complaint as possible.

## Section 2 - Scope

(2) This Policy will apply to the management of complaints from students, prospective students, former students and members of the public who have grounds for complaint under Section 6 of this Policy.

(3) This Policy excludes:

a. disclosures and formal reports of sexual assault and sexual harassment which will be managed under the Student Prevention and Response to Sexual Harm or Gender-Based Violence Procedure;
b. the review of decisions made by a member of University staff under any Regulation or policy that has an avenue of review and appeal under the Student Appeals Policy;
c. any matter that is currently being, or has in the past been dealt with under the Student Appeals Policy;
d. matters relating to the provision of health services by ACU Medical Centres which are under the jurisdiction of a State-based health complaints commission or ombudsman; and
e. a report of illegal, corrupt or unethical conduct occurring within ACU by an Eligible Whistleblower or Discloser under the Protected Disclosures Policy.

## Section 3 - Principles

(4) All actions under this Policy are to be based on values that are consistent with the ACU Mission, Identity and Values and are to be underpinned by principles of mutual respect and procedural fairness for and by all students, staff and others who may be involved.

(5) There will be no fee to lodge a complaint for any stage of complaint resolution.

(6) There are policies and processes that deliver timely resolution of formal complaints and appeals against academic and administrative decisions without charge or at reasonable cost to students, and these are applied consistently, fairly and without reprisal.

(7) All parties to a complaint have the right to be:

a. heard;
b. treated fairly without bias or pre-judgement;
c. informed of any complaint made which relates to them;
d. provided with an opportunity to respond to any complaint which relates to them;
e. informed about the status of any complaint which has been formally raised and to which they are a party, or in which they are named.

(8) A person handling a complaint will deal with the matter as expeditiously as possible following receipt of all relevant material from the complainant.

(9) A person handling a complaint will maintain appropriate confidentiality.

(10) The University will take all reasonable steps to prevent complainants suffering any disadvantage (including through victimisation) as a result of lodging a complaint.

(11) The University will monitor complaints and take action required to address any underlying causes.

# Section 4 - Definitions

(12) Terms used in this Policy and associated Procedures are consistent with the Glossary of Student and Course Terms. In the context of this Policy the following terms also apply:

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Appropriate confidentiality | Appropriate confidentiality refers to situations when a senior officer of the University may disclose to another person as much information as is necessary for the explicit purposes of clarification or assistance to enable the complaints process to be facilitated. |
| Complainant | Complainant means the student, prospective student, former student or member of the public who has initiated the complaint. |
| Complaint | Complaint means a statement or expression that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable. |
| Complaint handler | Complaint handler means the University staff member with responsibility for handling the complaint. |
| External agency | External agency means any third-party organisation at which professional experience, legitimate activity or service is offered or organised by the University. |
| Former student | A person who has previously been enrolled at the University in a program or to pursue any unit of study or research offered at or by the University. |
| Respondent | Respondent means a person or organisational unit against whom a complaint has been raised under this Policy. |
| Unreasonable complainant conduct | Unreasonable complainant conduct is any behaviour by a complainant which, because of its nature or frequency raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for the University, staff, other students, or the complainant themselves. |

# Section 5 - Formal Communications

(13) The timelines and associated provisions relating to formal communications contained in the Academic Regulations will apply to communications under this Policy.

# Section 6 - Grounds for Complaint

(14) Grounds for complaint include, but are not limited to:

a. the conduct of a member of University staff in connection with their role at ACU;
b. the conduct of an ACU student in connection with their status as a student;
c. the conduct of an external agency cooperating with ACU in its professional experience placements where the student or former student has been unable to resolve their complaint through the agency's complaint handling procedure;
d. the conduct of an authorised education agent assisting international applicants applying to study at ACU where the prospective student has been unable to resolve their complaint through the agency's complaint handling procedure;
e. course and teaching quality;
f. provision of services, including campus services, IT services and student services;
g. availability and/or quality of the University's facilities; or
h. a University, activity, event or action.

# Section 7 - Stages of Complaint Resolution

(15) A complaint may comprise the following stages:

a. Informal complaint resolution conducted in accordance with Section 4 of the Student and Public Complaints Procedure;
b. Formal complaint resolution conducted in accordance with Section 8 of the Student and Public Complaints Procedure; and
c. Review of complaint outcome conducted in accordance with Section 9 of the Student and Public Complaints Procedure.

# Section 8 - Support During the Complaint Process

(16) A student may seek confidential, independent advice from the Student Advocacy Service at any stage of a complaint.

(17) In any discussions or interviews in which a complainant participates during any complaint process under this Policy, whether as a complainant or respondent, the complainant may, at their discretion, be accompanied by one other person whom the complainant designates as their support person.

(18) A support person may not be a person:

a. with a qualification in law; or
b. who was involved in, associated with, or alleged to have been involved in or associated with the subject matter of the complaint.

(19) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students may also:

a. designate an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person as their support person, other than a person with a qualification in law; and/or
b. seek cultural support of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff through ACU's Indigenous Higher Education

Units.

(20) A support person may speak where required for reasons of clarification, but may only make submissions on behalf of a complainant if invited to do so by the person dealing with the matter.

# Section 9 - Withdrawal of Complaint

(21) At any time during the process, a complainant may withdraw a formal complaint or review of a complaint outcome by notice in writing to the Office of the Academic Registrar by emailing Student.Complaints@acu.edu.au.

(22) Upon such withdrawal, the complaint will be recorded on the Register of Complaints, but investigation of the complaint will normally be discontinued.

(23) The University reserves the right to further investigate matters on its own initiative based on information that has been provided as part of a withdrawn complaint, or based on information that the University has subsequently acquired that is relevant to the withdrawn complaint.

# Section 10 - Unreasonable Complainant Conduct

(24) It is expected that a complainant will comply with all aspects of the complaints process in a reasonable manner. The University will take action to restrict access to the student and public complaint process where it is determined that the behaviour of a complainant is having a disproportionate and unreasonable impact on the University, its staff, services, time and/or resources through any of the following:

a. unreasonable persistence that is continued, incessant and unrelenting including where the substance of the complaint has already been considered by the University and satisfactory measures have been taken to resolve the matter;
b. unreasonable demands (express or implied);
c. unreasonable lack of cooperation including submission of documents that are excessive in volume, unstructured, repetitive or irrelevant to the complaint, or withholding information, or misrepresenting others;
d. unreasonable arguments that are not based in reason or logic, that are incomprehensible, false or inflammatory, trivial or delirious;
e. unreasonable behaviours that compromise the health, safety and security of staff, other service users or the complainant themselves.

(25) In any case in which the behaviour of a complainant is found to constitute unreasonable complainant conduct, as defined in clause (24) of this Policy, action may be taken by the University to:

a. change or restrict access to the student and public complaint processes; and/or
b. refer the matter to be dealt with under the Student Conduct Policy.

# Section 11 - Other Avenues of Feedback or Complaint

(26) Any person may elect to provide feedback through the online feedback form where they are not seeking a formal resolution, but would like to submit feedback about their experience at, or of, ACU, the University's operations or to make suggestions for improvement.

(27) A student or former student may make a disclosure or formal report of sexual assault or sexual harassment in accordance with the Student Prevention and Response to Sexual Harm or Gender-Based Violence Procedure.

(28) While complainants are encouraged to resolve any concerns or complaints they may have, nothing in this Policy detracts from the right of a person to access any other appeal or complaint mechanism available to them as legislated in the relevant State or Territory. If any external process is initiated, the internal complaint process will be terminated.

(29) Following exhaustion of the internal complaint processes, in the case of matters for which there is no external avenue of appeal, or complaint mechanism available, a student can request an independent review in accordance with the Independent Review of Appeals or Complaints Policy.

(30) Where a student has accessed any independent review or external complaints mechanism, and their complaint is substantiated and results in an enforceable remedial action, ACU will comply with such action as soon as is practicable but no later than 10 working days from receipt of notification of the action required. For overseas students holding a student visa and enrolled in a CRICOS-registered course, this process will be undertaken in accordance with the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018.

# Section 12 - Associated Information

(31) For related legislation, policies, procedures and guidelines and any supporting resources please refer to the Associated Information tab.

## Status and Details

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| **Status** | Current |
| **Effective Date** | 24th April 2026 |
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| **Responsible Executive** | Helen Murnane<br>Academic Registrar |
| **Responsible Manager** | Gerard Goodwin-Moore<br>National Manager, Student Policy and Appeals |
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