AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF TRAINING SOLUTIONS

Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure

2025

Relevant Standards	Linked Documents
Outcome Standards 2025	• Student Complaints and Grievance Form • Student Handbook • Student Code of Conduct

1. Purpose

This policy and procedure outlines how AITS manages complaints and appeals in a fair, transparent and systematic way.

Its purpose is to ensure that all students, AITS staff and stakeholders have access to clear, free and confidential processes for resolving concerns, reviewing decisions and appealing outcomes.

It aims to:

- uphold the principles of natural justice, procedural fairness and transparency;
- resolve issues promptly and without prejudice;
- identify and correct systemic issues that affect quality or compliance; and
- demonstrate continuous improvement under the Outcome Standards for RTOs 2025.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all current and prospective students of AITS, including those studying face-to-face or online. It covers complaints and appeals relating to:

- academic decisions (e.g. assessment outcomes, progress, course completion);
- administrative actions or service quality;
- the behaviour of AITS staff, contractors, third parties or other students; and
- breaches of AITS policies or the Student Code of Conduct.

Complaints and appeals may be lodged personally or through a nominated representative (e.g. a parent or support person). The policy covers both:

- **complaints** – relating to actions, omissions, behaviours or decisions perceived as unfair or inappropriate; and
- **appeals** – relating to academic results, disciplinary decisions, or any decision affecting enrolment, fees or progression.

3. Definitions

Term	Definition
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction or concern about a service, AITS staff conduct, a decision or a process, requiring investigation or response.
Appeal	A formal request for review of a decision or outcome believed to be unfair or incorrect.
Complainant	The person lodging the complaint or appeal.
Respondent	The individual or department whose actions or decisions are under review.
Internal Appeal	A review conducted within AITS' internal processes.
External Appeal	An independent review by an external authority such as an ombudsman or regulator.
Natural Justice	Principles ensuring fairness: the right to be heard, freedom from bias, and evidence-based decision-making.

4. Legislative Context

The legislative basis for this policy is:

- Outcome Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2025;
- National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 (Cth);
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth);
- Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA); and
- Australian Consumer Law (Schedule 2, Competition and Consumer Act 2010).

5. Policy Principles: Fairness, Natural Justice and Accessibility

AITS commits to managing all complaints and appeals in a way that is:

- *__Free and accessible:__* the process is available at no cost and accessible through multiple channels (email, in person, form submission). Students may seek support from a friend, relative or advocate at any stage.
- *__Fair and impartial:__* every complaint or appeal will be handled objectively by AITS staff who are not involved in the matter. All parties have an equal opportunity to present evidence and be heard.
- *__Confidential and respectful:__* personal information will remain confidential and be used only for resolution purposes. Complaints will be handled with sensitivity to cultural and personal circumstances.
- *__Timely and transparent:__* investigations commence within 10 working days of receipt. Written outcomes, with reasons and actions, will be provided within 20 working days wherever possible.
- *__Without reprisal:__* students will not suffer any disadvantage, penalty or change to their enrolment because they have made a complaint or appeal.
- *__Evidence-based:__* all decisions will be based on available evidence, documented findings and applicable policies.

- *__Continuous improvement:__* AITS uses the outcomes of complaints and appeals to enhance its quality systems, training services and compliance practices.
- *__Natural justice:__* the principle of natural justice underpins the duty to act fairly and includes two rules: the fair dealing rule and the no bias rule. This means that all parties must be given the opportunity to present their case, be fully informed about allegations and decisions made, and have the right to be represented by another person.

In addition, a decision maker must have no personal interest beyond the scope of their role in this process and must be unbiased. If the decision maker cannot meet these requirements, they must immediately withdraw from the process. To expedite the process, students should not unduly interfere with the mediator or the procedure. Should interference by the student affect the normal course of events, AITS will not be held responsible for the consequences.

A full copy of this policy and procedure is available to students through the AITS website and the Student Handbook.

6. Informal Resolution Process

AITS encourages informal resolution wherever possible, so that issues are addressed quickly and constructively before escalation.

6.1 Step 1: Direct Discussion

- The student is encouraged to first raise the issue directly with the AITS staff member concerned, either verbally or in writing.
- Staff must listen respectfully, seek clarification, and attempt to resolve the matter immediately or within a few working days.

6.2 Step 2: Student Support Intervention

- If the matter is unresolved, it may be referred to the Student Support Officer (SSO) or Campus/AITS Manager, who will act as an independent facilitator.
- The SSO records the nature of the concern and any agreed resolution in the Informal Complaints Register.
- If the student remains dissatisfied, they are advised of their right to lodge a formal complaint.

7. Formal Complaints Policy

When informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, a formal complaint may be lodged. AITS will acknowledge the complaint within three (3) working days, commence the investigation within ten (10) working days, and normally issue a written outcome within twenty (20) working days. If additional time is required, the complainant will be notified in writing with reasons and updated timeframes.

AITS recognises the right of every student to lodge a formal complaint when they believe that a decision, action or service provided by AITS has been unfair, unreasonable or inconsistent with policy.

The following statements set out the policy intent and principles governing the management of all formal complaints.

Commitment to fairness and integrity

AITS is committed to treating all complaints seriously, fairly and without prejudice. All complaints will be handled with integrity, transparency and sensitivity to the needs and circumstances of the complainant.

Free and accessible process

Students and other stakeholders have free access to the complaints process. Lodging a complaint does not incur any fee, and assistance (interpreters, student support, advocates) will be provided at no cost where required.

Natural justice and procedural fairness

The principles of natural justice apply at every stage. All parties will have an equal opportunity to present evidence, respond to claims and receive an unbiased determination. Decision-makers must not have had prior involvement in the matter, and must declare any actual or perceived conflict of interest.

Timeliness and transparency

Complaints will be acknowledged in writing within three (3) working days of receipt, investigated within ten (10) working days, and finalised with a written outcome within twenty (20) working days wherever possible. If more time is needed due to complexity, the complainant will be informed in writing with reasons and a revised timeframe.

Confidentiality and privacy

All complaint information is treated as confidential and shared only with those directly involved in the investigation and decision-making process. Records are stored securely in accordance with privacy legislation and AITS recordkeeping requirements.

No disadvantage or retaliation

Students will not suffer any form of disadvantage, penalty or discrimination for lodging a complaint in good faith. Their enrolment, assessment outcomes and access to services will remain unaffected during the process.

Authority and responsibility

The Campus Manager is responsible for coordinating investigations of formal complaints and issuing written outcomes. The Compliance Manager maintains the Complaints and Appeals Register and monitors adherence to timeframes. The Chief Executive Officer provides oversight, ensures impartiality, and approves corrective actions or systemic changes arising from complaints.

Evidence-based decision-making

Decisions will be supported by documented evidence, relevant policy references and consideration of any mitigating factors. Outcomes must include reasons and any corrective or preventive actions.

Systemic improvement

Outcomes of formal complaints contribute to continuous improvement. The Compliance Manager analyses trends, reports findings to the Executive Committee, and ensures that lessons learned are incorporated into policies, procedures and AITS staff training.

Right to appeal and external review

Where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of a formal complaint, they are entitled to lodge an internal appeal within twenty (20) working days of the decision and, if still dissatisfied, to seek an external review through an independent body (see section 11).

8. Formal Complaints Procedure

Step	Action
1. Lodgement	• A formal complaint is lodged when informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate. • The student submits a Complaint Form or written statement to the Campus/AITS Manager (or to the Compliance Manager if the complaint concerns the Campus/AITS Manager). • The complaint should describe the issue, dates, parties involved and the desired outcome. • If the complaint relates to the CEO, it is lodged with the Executive Committee Chair.
2. Acknowledgement and registration	• AITS acknowledges receipt of the complaint in writing within three (3) working days. • The complaint is recorded in the Complaints and Appeals Register, and the student is informed of the process, timeframes and their rights (including the right to appeal and to access external bodies).
3. Investigation	• The Campus/AITS Manager or a delegated committee commences the investigation within ten (10) working days. • The investigator reviews relevant evidence, interviews the parties involved, and ensures all sides have the opportunity to be heard (natural justice). • Where a conflict of interest exists, an alternative investigator is appointed.
4. Decision and outcome	A written outcome is provided within twenty (20) working days, including: • the findings and reasons for the decision; • any corrective or preventive action to be implemented; and • information about the student's right to lodge an internal appeal within twenty (20) working days. If additional time is needed due to complexity, the student will be advised in writing with reasons and updated timeframes.
5. Implementation and recordkeeping	• Any actions or remedies are implemented immediately by the responsible AITS staff member or department. • All documents – complaint form, correspondence, evidence and outcomes – are filed and retained in the Complaints and Appeals Register for at least seven (7) years. • The Compliance Manager reviews closed cases to identify trends for continuous improvement.
6. Right to appeal	If dissatisfied with the outcome, the student may lodge an internal appeal within twenty (20) working days of receiving the written decision. The student's enrolment will remain active during the appeal process.

9. Internal Appeals Policy

An internal appeal allows a student to request a review of a decision made under a previous complaint, disciplinary or academic process.

Grounds for appeal include that:

- a procedural error occurred;
- the decision was unreasonable or disproportionate; or
- new or relevant evidence was not previously considered.

The internal appeal must be lodged in writing using the Appeal Form and submitted to the Campus/AITS Manager or the Compliance Manager.

All appeals will be heard by the committee on a designated date. Minutes of the meeting will be taken and filed.

If any internal or external appeal results in a decision or recommendation in favour of the student, AITS will immediately implement the decision or recommendation and undertake a quality review to correct or improve its processes and prevent future occurrences.

The outcomes of an appeal will be notified to students within seven (7) working days, and copies of the correspondence kept on the student file.

Students will be advised of their right to access an external appeal process with appropriate agencies if they are not satisfied with AITS' internal complaints and appeals processes or the conduct of those processes. AITS maintains a Complaints and Appeals Register to record all complaints and appeals, and uses this data for quality and continuous improvement purposes.

9.1 Academic Review/Appeal Procedure (Assessment Outcomes)

This procedure sits under the Complaints and Appeals Policy but is specific to academic results. It ensures a clear separation between academic judgement and administrative review, in line with the governance of assessment under the Outcome Standards.

All students have the right to request an academic review. Where a student is dissatisfied with the outcome or result of the assessment of an assignment and/or examination, the student should first discuss this informally with their trainer/assessor.

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, the student may submit a written request for a formal academic review to the Course Coordinator within twenty (20) working days of receiving the result. The request must outline why the student is requesting a formal review. The Course Coordinator will seek to resolve the formal academic review by appointing an independent and impartial educator to investigate and make a recommendation. The Course Coordinator will make the final decision on all formal academic reviews.

All parties involved in a formal academic review will be advised in writing of the outcome, and the reasons for the decision, within twenty (20) working days of the date the review was lodged. If a student's formal academic review is successful, the academic result will be amended.

Where a formal academic review is not upheld, the student will be advised in writing of the option to access the appeals procedure.

10. Internal Appeals Procedure

Stage	Action
Acknowledgement and registration	Appeals are acknowledged within three (3) working days and entered into the Complaints and Appeals Register.
Formation of Appeals Committee	• The CEO convenes an Appeals Committee of at least two senior AITS staff members who have not previously been involved. • The committee may include the Compliance Manager, Academic Manager and/or an independent advisor.
Review and hearing	• The Appeals Committee reviews all documentation and may invite the student to attend a meeting to present their case. • The student may bring a support person or interpreter. • The hearing is conducted in a non-adversarial and confidential setting.
Decision and notification	• A written decision is provided within seven (7) working days of the hearing. • The outcome states whether the appeal is upheld or dismissed, with clear reasons. • If the appeal is upheld, the corrective action is implemented immediately. • If it is dismissed, the student is informed of their right to pursue an external appeal.
Interim enrolment status	During the appeal process, the student's enrolment will remain active.

The Appeals Committee's deliberations and findings form part of AITS' self-assurance evidence under Outcome Standard 4.4 (Continuous Improvement) and will be included in the annual governance report.

11. External Complaints and Appeals Options

If a student remains dissatisfied after all internal processes are completed, they may access an independent external review at no cost through the appropriate external body. AITS cooperates fully with any external review, agrees to be bound by the recommendations of an independent mediator or external body, and the CEO (or their nominee) will ensure that any recommendations are implemented within 30 days of receiving the final report. Each complaint, grievance and appeal, and its outcome, is recorded in writing, and each party is given a written statement of the outcome, including the reasons for the decision.

Students may also seek legal redress through the usual court processes, or approach other agencies relevant to their situation, including:

- the National Training Complaints Hotline (phone 13 38 73);
- the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) (https://www.asqa.gov.au/);
- the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (privacy matters) (https://www.oaic.gov.au/);
- the Australian Human Rights Commission (https://www.humanrights.gov.au/); and
- the Department of Education (https://www.education.gov.au/).

Students may also contact the Department of Education at: GPO Box 9880, Canberra ACT 2601, or via http://education.gov.au/contact-department

If the matter falls within equal opportunity guidelines, it will be managed under the relevant AITS policies and procedures. The procedures set out in this document do not replace or modify procedures or other responsibilities that may arise under other policies, under statute or under any other law. Nothing in this policy and procedure limits the rights of individuals to take action under Australia's consumer protection laws, or to pursue other legal remedies.

12. Monitoring, Recordkeeping and Continuous Improvement

- **Register maintenance:** all complaints and appeals (informal and formal) are recorded in the Complaints and Appeals Register, noting the date received, issue category, responsible officer, resolution date and outcome.
- **Document retention:** records, including forms, correspondence, meeting notes and outcomes, are securely retained for seven (7) years.
- **Data analysis:** the Compliance Manager reviews the Register quarterly to identify patterns, recurring issues or areas for improvement.
- **Reporting:** findings are reported in the quarterly governance report to the CEO and Executive Committee.
- **Continuous improvement:** where systemic issues are identified, corrective actions are implemented and recorded in the Continuous Improvement Register under Outcome Standard 4.4.
- **Self-assurance evidence:** all complaints and appeals data feed into AITS' annual Self-Assurance Report and Continuous Improvement Plan.
- **Quality review schedule:** the Complaints and Appeals Register is reviewed quarterly by the Compliance Manager and tabled at Executive Committee meetings.

13. Responsibilities

Role	Key Responsibilities
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	Approves policy and procedures, oversees the Appeals Committee, and ensures implementation of systemic improvements arising from complaints and appeals.
Campus/AITS Manager	Investigates complaints, ensures fairness, documents evidence and issues written outcomes.
Compliance Manager	• Maintains the Complaints and Appeals Register, monitors compliance with timeframes, and analyses trends for self-assurance reports. • Prepares quarterly trend and risk analysis reports for the Executive Committee as part of AITS' self-assurance cycle.
Student Support Officer	Provides initial guidance and support to students; assists with documentation and access to interpreters or advocates.
Appeals Committee	Conducts impartial reviews of contested decisions and ensures procedural fairness throughout.

14. Process Flowcharts

Figure 1: Complaint Procedure

Step	Action
1	The student meets the Campus Manager. The Campus Manager gathers information.
2	The matter is discussed informally and options are considered. **Resolved?** Yes – end. No – go to step 3.
3	The student lodges a formal complaint using the Student Complaints and Grievance Form. AITS records it in the Complaints Register. **Resolved?** Yes – end. No – go to step 4.
4	AITS refers the matter to the Complaints and Appeals Committee and appoints a mediator (internal or external). **Resolved?** Yes – end. No – go to step 5.
5	The student is supported to explore external complaint options to resolve the matter.

Figure 2: Appeal Procedure

Step	Action
1	The student meets the Campus Manager to discuss the appeal context.
2	The matter is discussed informally and options are considered. **Resolved?** Yes – end. No – go to step 3.
3	The student lodges a formal appeal using the Student Complaints and Grievance Form. AITS records it in the Complaints Register and refers it to the Complaints and Appeals Committee.
4	The Complaints and Appeals Committee convenes, reviews the case and makes a final decision. **Resolved?** Yes – end. No – go to step 5.
5	The student is supported to explore external complaint options to resolve the matter.