



Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

1. Policy

This policy/procedure supports the GTO to provide a process for complaints and appeals to be heard and actioned. This includes any allegations involving the conduct of

- the GTO, its Consultants and other staff;
- a third party providing services on the GTOs behalf, its Consultants and other staff; or
- a trainee/apprentice of the GTO

All complaints and appeals received by Victorian Group Training will be viewed as an opportunity for improvement.

Despite all efforts of Victorian Group Training to provide satisfactory services to its employees and clients, complaints may occasionally arise that require formal resolution. The following procedures provide employees and clients the opportunity to have any issues relating to a substantiated complaint or appeal resolved and resolutions reached that attempt to satisfy all parties involved. This complaints and appeals process will be at no cost to the employee or client (unless referred to a third party; see procedure for more details).

2. Procedure

The complaints and appeals policy and procedure and applicable form is made available to all employees, potential employees, and clients by directly contacting the GTO, through the GTO's website, and within the VGTC Information Manual.

2.1 General Complaints

Where possible all non-formal attempts shall be made to resolve the issue. This may include advice, discussions, and general mediation in relation to the issue and the complainant's issue. Any staff member can be involved in this informal process to resolve issues but once a complainant has placed a formal complaint / appeal the following procedures must be followed:

- Any employee, potential employee, or third party may submit a formal complaint to Victorian Group Training with the reasonable expectation that all complaints will be treated with integrity and privacy. There is no cost for accessing the internal complaints and appeals process.
- Complainants have the right to access advice and support from independent external agencies / persons at any point of the complaint and appeals process. Use of external services will be at the complainant's costs unless authorised by the CEO.
- Any person wishing to submit a formal complaint or appeal can do so by completing the 'Complaints and Appeals Form' and state their case providing as many details as possible. This form can be gained by contacting the GTO, or through the GTO website.

- All formally submitted complaints or appeals are submitted to the General Manager or directly to the General Manager. Complaints are to include the following information:
 - Submission date of complaint
 - Name of complainant;
 - Nature of complaint;
 - Date of the event which lead to the complaint
 - Attachments (if applicable)

- Once a formal complaint is received it is to be entered into the 'Complaints and Appeals Register' which is monitored by the Operations Manager regularly. The information to be contained and updated within the register is as follows:
 - Submission date of complaint
 - Name of complainant
 - Description of complaint/appeal
 - Determined Resolution
 - Date of Resolution

- The complainant shall be notified in writing that their complaint has been received and registered with the GTO.

- A complainant may be assisted or accompanied by a support person regardless of the nature of the issue or complaint throughout the process at all times.

- The General Manager shall then refer the matter to the appropriate staff to resolve, or make a decision on the complaint within 10 working days and keep the complainant informed of any decisions or outcomes concluded, or processes in place to deal with the complaint.

- As part of the process of investigating the complaint the General Manager shall ensure the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness are maintained at all times. This includes informing and involving all parties involved in the allegations or cause for the complaint. There will be opportunities provided to all parties to provide their version of the event(s) or action(s) that have caused the complaint. The collection of information and details regarding the complaint will be conducted in a manner that ensures the privacy and confidentiality of all parties involved.

- To ensure the fairness of the complaints system, the complaints resolution process (investigation and determining outcomes of a complaint) must be completed by a person independent of the complaint. In other words, where the complaint is in relation to the CEO or General Manager's actions, the complaint shall be referred immediately to the external and independent mediator listed below.

- All complaints must be dealt with and finalised as soon as practicable. In the unlikely event that the complaint is not finalised within 60 calendar days, the GTO shall ensure that the complainant shall be provided reasons for the delay and will be regularly kept informed and updated of the progress of the matter.

- Once a decision has been reached the General Manager shall be required to inform all parties involved of any decisions or outcomes that are concluded in writing. Within the notification of the outcome of the formal complaint the complainant shall also be notified that they have the right of appeal. To appeal a decision, the GTO must receive, in writing, grounds of the appeal. Complainants are referred to the appeals procedure.

- The General Manager shall ensure that the GTO will act immediately on any substantiated complaint. If the internal or any external complaint handling or appeal process results in a decision that supports the complainant, the registered provider must immediately implement any decision and/or corrective and preventative action that is required and advise the complainant of the outcome.
- Copies of all documentation, outcomes and further action required will be placed into the 'Complaints and Appeals Register' by the General Manager and on the employee's file / complainants file.

2.2 Appealing a Decision

All complainants have the right to appeal decisions made by Victorian Group Training where reasonable grounds can be established. The areas in which a complainant may appeal a decision made by Victorian Group Training may include:

- Assessments conducted
 - Deferral, suspension, or cancellation decisions made in relation to the student's enrolment
 - Or any other conclusion / decision that is made after a complaint has been dealt with by Victorian Group Training in the first instance.
- To activate the appeal process, the complainant is to complete a 'Complaints and Appeals Form' which is to include a summary of the grounds the appeal is based upon. The reason the complainant feels the decision is unfair is to be clearly explained and help and support with this process can be gained from Student Administration Department.
 - The complainant shall be notified in writing that their appeal has been received and registered with the GTO.
 - The General Manager shall then determine the validity of the appeal and organise a meeting with all parties involved in the matter and attempt to seek resolution where appropriate.
 - The process for all formally lodged appeals will begin within 10 working days of the appeal being lodged.
 - All appeals must be dealt with and finalised as soon as practicable. In the unlikely event that the complaint is not finalised within 60 calendar days, the GTO shall ensure that the complainant shall be provided reasons for the delay and will be regularly kept informed and updated of the progress of the matter.
 - The General Manager shall ensure that Victorian Group Training acts on any substantiated appeal.
 - Where an appeal has been lodged it will be defined into one of the following categories and the appropriate procedures followed:

General appeals

- Where a complainant has appealed a decision or outcome of a formal complaint, they are required to notify Victorian Group Training in writing within 20 working days of the grounds of their appeal. Any supporting documentation should also be attached to the appeal.
- The appeal shall be lodged through the General Manager and they shall ensure the details of the appeal are added to the 'Complaints and Appeals Register'.

- The General Manager shall be notified and shall seek details regarding the initial documentation of the complaint and shall make a decision based on the grounds of the appeal.
- The complainant shall be notified in writing of the outcome with reasons for the decisions, and the 'Complaints and Appeals Register' updated. The complainant shall also be provided the option of activating the external appeals process if they are not satisfied with the outcome. The complainant is required to notify Victorian Group Training if they wish to proceed with the external appeals process.

2.3 External (Independent) Appeals:

In addition to the above internal processes, if the processes fail to resolve the complaint or appeal, or the complainant or appellant is still dissatisfied with the decision of the GTO, an application with an independent and external dispute resolution body can be submitted to allow for any decisions made by the GTO in relation to the complaints and / or appeals process to be reviewed independently of the GTO. (See below for contact details).

It should also be noted that any complaints about the CEO, General Manager or Managing Director will be automatically be dealt with by this external and independent mediator in the first instance of the complaint being received.

Where the GTO is informed that the complainant has accessed external appeals processes:

- The GTO will comply with the findings of the external appeals process.
- Where a decision or outcome is in favour of the complainant, Victorian Group Training shall follow the required action and recommendation from the relevant external appeals organisation to satisfy the complainant's grievance as soon as practicable.
The decision of the independent mediator is final and any further action the student wishes to take is outside the GTO's policies and procedures. The complainant shall be referred to the appropriate government agencies and this information can be gained from the General Manager.
- All records and correspondence in relation to an external appeal shall be maintained with the initial complaint and internal appeal documentation within the 'Complaints and Appeals Register' and the employee file for a minimum of 5 years.

Independent Mediator:

The Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria (DSCV) is a free dispute resolution and mediation service funded by the Victorian Government and may be able to assist resolve any outstanding complaint or issue with the complaint handling process. Further details and office locations for this service are available from <http://www.disputes.vic.gov.au/>

Organisation:	Disputes Settlement Centre of Victoria (http://www.disputes.vic.gov.au/)
Contact Point:	<u>Melbourne Office:</u> Level 4, 456 Lonsdale Street Melbourne VIC 3000 Tel: 1300 372 888 Fax: 8684 1311

Further information - VRQA

If, after the GTO's internal complaints and appeals processes have been completed, you still believe the GTO is breaching or has breached its legal requirements, you can submit a complaint to the Victorian Registrations & Qualifications Authority (VRQA) contacting them on 1300 722 603 or at the VRQA website complaint link: <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/StateRegister/Public.aspx/LodgeComplaint>

Except in exceptional circumstances, you must attach evidence to your complaint form showing:

- that you have followed your GTO's formal complaints procedure, and
- the GTO's response.

VRQA's processes require you to identify yourself to VRQA as a complainant, although you may request that your identity is kept confidential throughout any investigation that VRQA undertakes.

2.5 Preventative and Corrective Action

If the internal or any external complaint handling or appeal processes result in a decision that supports the complainant, Victorian Group Training will immediately implement any decision and/or corrective and preventative action that is required, and advise the complainant, and all involved in the matter, of the outcome.

In all cases where a complaint, internal appeal, or external appeal is submitted results in any type of corrective action to be taken by the GTO, details of the complaint and / or appeal shall be reviewed to ensure that steps are taken to eliminate or mitigate the likelihood of recurrence.

In addition, the complaints and appeals register shall be monitored by the General Manager to ensure that all complaints and appeals submitted, regardless of the outcome, are able to be monitored and reviewed to ensure appropriate steps and actions are identified to prevent further re-occurrence.

The details of the complaint and resulting outcome(s) shall be reviewed as part of the GTO's next management meeting with the purpose of identifying the potential causes of the initial complaint. The GTO will then determine appropriate steps to be taken so as to remove the potential issue arising again in the future. Where the complaint has arisen due to any employee or student actions, appropriate mechanisms shall be implemented to ensure appropriate education is provided to prevent recurrence of potential issues.