

Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure

Version 1.1

Overview

This policy establishes the framework through which AIM Institute manages student complaints and appeals in a fair, transparent and timely manner.

The Institute is committed to providing accessible processes that enable students to raise concerns regarding academic or non-academic matters and to seek review of decisions affecting their studies.

AIM Institute recognises the rights of students to lodge a complaint and have access to effective and efficient internal processes that are timely, impartial, and at no cost to the student.

This policy supports compliance with:

Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) 2021 – Standard 2.4 (Student Grievances and Complaints)

National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 – Standard 10 (Complaints and Appeals)

Scope

This policy applies to:

- all higher education students enrolled at AIM Institute
- both domestic and international students
- academic and non-academic complaints.

This policy applies to complaints relating to:

- academic decisions
- assessment outcomes
- student services
- administrative processes
- staff conduct

This policy and procedure is not intended to limit the rights of individuals to take action under the relevant State or Commonwealth Law or an individual's rights to pursue other legal remedies.

Policy and Procedure

Principles

AIM Institute manages complaints and appeals according to the following principles.

Accessibility

Students must have access to clear, accessible processes for lodging complaints or appeals. Students are able to access the complaints and appeals system (both internal and external) at no cost to the student.

Procedural Fairness

All matters will be considered fairly, impartially and without bias.

Timeliness

Complaints and appeals will be handled promptly and within reasonable timeframes. AIM Institute expects students to present complaints to the institute within reasonable timeframes.

Confidentiality

Information relating to complaints and appeals will be handled sensitively and in accordance with privacy obligations.

Protection from Victimisation

Students who raise complaints will not be disadvantaged or victimised.

Continuous Improvement

Complaint outcomes may be used to improve institutional policies and practices.

Definitions

Complaint

An expression of dissatisfaction regarding academic or non-academic matters that requires resolution.

Appeal

A request for review of a formal decision made by the Institute.

Complainant

A student who lodges a complaint or appeal under this policy.

Types of Complaints

Complaints may relate to:

- teaching and learning experiences
- assessment processes
- academic progression decisions, including grading and results

- administrative decisions
- access to learning resources
- staff behaviour
- discrimination or harassment.

Complaints relating to academic misconduct or academic integrity matters may be addressed through separate procedures where appropriate. For any gender-based violence concern, that policy should be consulted. For any sexual assault or sexual harassment concern, that policy should be considered.

Informal Resolution

Where possible, students are encouraged to resolve concerns informally in the first instance.

This may involve discussing the issue with:

- the relevant academic staff member
- course coordinator
- student support staff.

Informal resolution aims to address concerns quickly and effectively. If the student's concern(s) are satisfied, the complaint will be considered finalised. The staff member is expected to make a note of the concern and the resolution in the student's file (on the Student Management System) for future needs or reporting. No further action or reporting is required.

Formal Complaint Process

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, the student is not comfortable attempting to resolve the concern informally, or is of a more serious nature, a student may submit a formal complaint. A formal complaint **MUST** be submitted in writing. While preferable, it is **NOT** required for the student to try and resolve the complaint informally prior to submitting a formal complaint.

Lodging a Complaint

Students may submit complaints:

- in writing via email or letter to one of the official addresses of AIM Institute.
- In writing via email or letter to the CEO, Academic Director, or other senior management representative.
- through a student support officer or similar support person

A complaint or criticism received by social media or another public channel is not considered a formal complaint and will not be considered under this policy.

The formal complaint must be submitted within 20 business days after the latest relevant action or notification of a decision regarding the matter. An appeal received outside this timeframe will only be considered at the discretion of the CEO of AIM Institute.

The complaint should include:

- details of the concern
- relevant supporting information
- the outcome sought.

Assessment of Complaint

Upon receipt of a complaint, the Institute will:

1. acknowledge the complaint as soon as practicable.
2. assess the nature of the issue
3. determine the appropriate process for investigation
4. keep the complainant informed of progress, including the need for any additional information.

Investigation Process

Where a complaint requires investigation, the Institute will:

- review relevant documentation
- consult relevant staff or parties
- provide the complainant with an opportunity to present information.

Investigations will be conducted in accordance with the principles of procedural fairness.

If the complaint is against a member of staff, the formal complaint should be forwarded to the CEO for dissemination. If the complaint is in regard to the CEO - then the complaint should be forwarded to the Chair of the Board of Directors.

An academic complaint (including but not limited to results, grades, assessments, academic support, enrolment and re-enrolment) will be managed by the Academic Director or their delegate. A non-academic complaint (including but not limited to fees, refunds, facilities) will be managed by the CEO or their delegate.

The AIM Institute representative managing the appeal may contact the prior decision maker and other contributors to the initial investigation, as well as pursue additional sources for information. As complaints are often sensitive in nature, only appropriate and relevant people will be contacted in relation to the complaint.

AIM Institute is committed to the timely resolution of complaints. To this end, all investigations will be concluded with a decision made within 20 business days of the appeal being received by AIM Institute. In the event that this timeline is unable to be achieved, the student (complainant) will be notified as soon as possible.

Outcome of Complaint

Following investigation, the Institute will provide the student with written notification of:

- the outcome of the complaint
- the reasons for the decision

- any actions taken where appropriate
- the option to appeal the decision if applicable.

The outcome will be provided to the student within 2 business days of the decision being made.

All decisions must be recorded in the student's file as confidential material.

Appeals Process

Students may lodge an appeal where they believe:

- the complaint process was not followed appropriately
- new information has become available
- the outcome was unreasonable.

Appeals must normally be lodged within 20 business days following notification of the complaint outcome. Appeals may only be made following a formal complaint. An informal complaint, if not resolved, is not eligible for appeal.

In the first instance, an appeal will be considered by an appropriate senior officer or committee not previously involved in the matter. Typically, this will be the CEO (where the decision was previously made by the Academic Director) or the Academic Director (where the decision was made by the CEO). If necessary, the Board of Directors may be convened to hear an appeal. If there are no grounds for appeal, the appeal will be rejected and the appellant notified.

If the appeal is deemed valid, the senior officer or committee will conduct an investigation, following the procedure detailed above. The appellant will be kept informed as the appeal proceeds and may be required to validate or confirm information. In all instances, AIM Institute will endeavour to minimise the stress and emotional toll on the person making the complaint by only asking for additional information (or validating previously provided information) when strictly necessary.

The AIM Institute representative managing the appeal may contact the prior decision maker and other contributors to the initial investigation, as well as pursue other options for information.

If the appeal results in support for the initial investigation decision, the student will be notified and the prior decision will be upheld. If the appeal results in overturning the initial decision, the student will also be notified and appropriate rectification will proceed. Contacting the student and managing the outcome of the appeal is the responsibility of the appropriate senior officer.

The appeal process must be administered within 20 business days, or sooner, if practicable. Once a decision has been made, the student must be advised of the decision within 2 days.

All decisions must be recorded in the student's file as confidential material.

External Review

If a student is not satisfied with the outcome of the internal complaints or appeals process, they may seek external review.

Students may access external complaints mechanisms such as:

The Commonwealth Ombudsman (for international students)

<https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/>

The National Student Ombudsman (for domestic students)

<https://www.nso.gov.au/>

Records Management

Records of complaints and appeals will be maintained securely in accordance with the Institute's record management practices. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, notes and decisions will be kept in the student's file on the Student Management System. If a complaint or appeal involves multiple students, copies of the reports and materials will be recorded in each student's file. The senior management representative who manages the complaint is responsible for ensuring this information is recorded in the student file(s).

Complaint data may be analysed periodically to identify systemic issues and support institutional improvement.

Governance and Oversight

The Institute will maintain oversight of complaints and appeals processes through appropriate governance mechanisms.

Summary information regarding complaints may be reported periodically through institutional governance processes to support quality assurance and continuous improvement.

Support for Students

Students involved in complaints or appeals processes may access support services where appropriate. Students may also be accompanied by a support person during formal processes where permitted. The support person is able to speak for the student, but should not be providing legal representation or legal advice during a meeting.

The student has the right to be represented by someone else during the formal processes if they feel they are unable to attend in person.

Intention to Report – International Students only

If circumstances arise that require AIM Institute to report a student to the Department of Home Affairs, AIM Institute will first issue that student a Notice of Intention to Report. This Notice will include:

- The reason for the intention to report

- Advice to the student that the report will be made in 20 days, allowing the student to appeal the decision to report. This date will be provided in writing.
- Information on how the student may appeal the intention to report

If the student decides to appeal, they are expected to submit, in writing, an appropriate application for appeal, with supporting documents, to AIM Institute. This may be provided via AIM Institute's primary email address, or in person to the main office. The application for appeal should include a rationale against the report, any reasons for the situation that has triggered the reporting process, and a description of changes the student will make if their appeal is successful.

It is at the discretion of AIM Institute if students are able to continue to attend classes while their appeal proceeds.

If the student does appeal, the CEO and Academic Director will meet and determine the reasonableness of the appeal and if further information is required. The CEO and Academic Director will make a decision on the appeal as soon as feasible, with the expectation that a determination will be made within 20 business days of receipt of the appeal.

The senior management representative who handles the appeal is responsible for ensuring that the student's file is updated with all materials from the appeal, including a copy of the Notice of Intention to Report, the student's application for appeal and all documentation including the outcomes and rationale from the investigation.

Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or earlier if required due to changes in regulatory requirements, institutional operations, or student cohort profile.

Regulatory references	• Higher Education Standards Framework 2021 • ESOS Act and National Code • relevant regulatory guidance and sector practice.
AIM Institute Policy references	• Student Code of Conduct • Academic Integrity Policy • Access, Diversity and Equity Policy • Student Support Policy.

Document Approval

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Responsibilities:			
Contact:	info@aiminstitute.nsw.edu.au +61 02 4505 1924		

Document Change and Review log

Version	Updated by	Approval date and body	Details
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1.1	TW	BOD	Review clause