

Complaint management procedure

This is a mandated procedure under the operational policy framework. Any edits to this page must follow the process outlined on the [creating, updating and deleting policy documents](#) page.

Overview

The department promotes and values feedback and works to manage complaints to improve performance, systems and service delivery.

This procedure aims to:

- identify the key processes required to support staff (including corporate office staff, principals, preschool directors, education directors) to consistently and effectively manage feedback and resolve complaints
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of staff in complaint handling
- encourage and support where possible, the resolution of complaints at a local level by the original decision maker.

The complaint management procedure aligns with the [complaint management policy](#).

Scope

This procedure applies to all department staff including corporate office staff and staff in preschools and schools.

The development and review of local procedure documents at a school or partnership level must be consistent with the [complaint management policy](#) and this procedure.

Detail

The department endorses a 3 level approach to complaint handling recognised as best practice in the Australian / New Zealand Standard (Guidelines for complaint management in organisations) AS/NZS 10002:2014.

Level 1 complaint management – responsibilities of school, preschool and corporate office staff

Schools and preschools

Schools and preschools must try to resolve complaints at the local level, wherever possible, before using [level 2 complaint management \(in this procedure\)](#). Teachers and support staff are often approached first by parents with a concern or complaint, and staff should make every effort to resolve these matters where possible.

All complaints received by the school or preschool and the decisions or actions taken to address the complaints must be documented in the school complaints register and reported annually. Refer to this procedure's [recording complaints](#).

Customer Feedback unit (CFU) staff will refer complaints back to the original decision maker and/or site leadership if they have not been addressed at this level already. This gives the original decision maker an opportunity to explain their decision or action and try to resolve the matter first. In circumstances where the original decision maker and/or site leader does not think it appropriate that they review or manage a complaint, contact the CFU to determine the best course of action.

School and preschool staff responsibilities

Parents should raise any concerns or complaints about their child's education with their child's teacher. It is expected that teachers will:

- acknowledge the complaint
- make a time available (face-to-face, by phone) as soon as reasonably possible to discuss with the parent/s their complaint
- consider relevant legislation, departmental policy and guidelines and school or preschool processes and/or seek advice from your site leader
- identify and discuss with the parent possible courses of action that could be taken to resolve their complaint and the timeframe for this to occur
- where practicable, follow up with the parents, after a reasonable period of time for any changes to take effect, to ensure that the parent is satisfied with the outcome. For example at parent interview, telephone or email.
- if appropriate (depending on the nature of the concern or complaint) keep a written record of the complaint, its progress and outcomes (refer to this procedure's [recording complaints](#) section)
- if a parent is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint management process, or decides that it is more appropriate to discuss their complaint directly with a member of the leadership team, then the person hearing the complaint must follow up by scheduling a meeting or phone call with the school leader (if applicable).
- The [raising a complaint with the Department for Education](#) is mandated for use in all schools and preschools. This information must be easily accessible for parents:
 - on the department's website
 - on each school and preschool website
 - in the school or preschool administrative office.

Online staff training in complaints management and resolution for education sites is available on [plink \(login required\)](#).

For more advice refer to [strategies for dealing with unreasonable customer conduct](#).

Concerns and complaints received by a staff member about another staff member or an issue outside their responsibility to resolve, must be reported to a member of their leadership team.

Refer to [resolving complaints and requesting reviews](#) for more information about employee complaints.

The [Incident Management directorate](#) receives and assesses cases of suspected or alleged serious misconduct against department employees.

School leadership staff responsibilities

It's expected that when leadership staff handle a complaint they will:

- wherever possible, make every reasonable effort to resolve parent concerns or complaints at the local level in a timely and effective manner
- ensure that staff are familiar with the department's complaints policy and that school or preschool websites have a link to the policy and associated information including '[raising a complaint with the Department for Education](#)'
- ensure staff understand the complaint process and are aware of and have access to appropriate training
- advise all relevant parties once a complaint has been received
- consider whether the parent may require a support person at a meeting
- ensure the complaint is documented and appropriate action determined
- recommend to the education director or director any system improvements at a broader level that may reduce the likelihood of similar complaints
- seek advice and support from the partnerships, schools and preschools division, phone 8226 1290
- refer to [feedback and complaints about schools and preschools](#) and contact the CFU as required
- advise the parent of their right to contact the CFU, if a resolution at the school or preschool can't be found.

Education director responsibilities

In cases where a principal or preschool director has exhausted all avenues at a local level, they may contact the education director for advice and support to enable them to resolve a complaint. If the matter is referred to the education director, the principal or preschool director should ensure that they advise the parent when they will be next contacted.

The education director is responsible for:

- complaints relating to the conduct of the principal or preschool director
- an escalation about enrolment issues where students are denied access to a school within their zone or a request for a review against a decision not to enrol a student into a school outside their zone, (refer to the [school and preschool enrolment policy \(PDF, 815.8 KB\)](#)). An education director may also refer enrolment issues to enrolment officers of the department, where applicable
- an escalation about a school decision to deny transport to a student and the decision has been confirmed in writing by the school to the CFU. The CFU will give this information to the education director via email and ask them to communicate their response to the parent. For more information, refer to the [school transport policy \(PDF, 599.8 KB\)](#)

- grievances made in relation to the exclusion of a student from a school. For more information refer to [suspension, exclusion and expulsion](#) and the [behaviour support policy \(PDF, 200.6 KB\)](#)
- a matter referred or escalated by CFU due to complexity and sensitivity of the complaint, by negotiation.

Corporate offices

On receipt of a complaint, corporate office staff must ensure that a complaint record is completed outlining details about the matter including resolution. You can use the [corporate office complaint record template \(PDF, 1.3 MB\)](#).

Corporate office staff must make every effort to resolve complaints as soon as possible. Where required (for example if the customer is not satisfied that their matter has been addressed), provide customers with an appropriate escalation point. This could be to their line manager or executive.

Corporate office staff will record all complaints received on the [corporate complaint register \(XLSX, 65.0 KB\)](#).

If you're unsure of the process, actions or escalation options, contact the CFU for advice on 1800 677 435.

Corporate office staff responsibilities

Corporate offices must have a process for managing complaints received in relation to their own business unit. On receipt of a complaint, corporate office staff must:

- acknowledge the complaint within 2 business days and make a time as soon as possible (if unable at the time) to discuss the complaint further
- consider relevant legislation, departmental policy and guidelines
- identify and discuss possible courses of action that could be taken to resolve their complaint and the timeframe for this to occur
- if appropriate (depending on the nature of the concern or complaint) keep a written record of the complaint, its progress and outcomes
- If a customer is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint management process, or decides that it is more appropriate to direct their complaint to a member of the leadership team, then the staff member hearing the complaint is to provide escalation details.

Recording complaints

Each school, preschool and corporate business unit must have a process for effectively and appropriately documenting complaints and the action taken to resolve the complaint.

[Site complaint records \(PDF, 1.3 MB\)](#) providing the parent's details and an outline of the complaint must be completed and documented on the [site complaints register \(XLSX, 112.1 KB\)](#) for schools and preschools.

For corporate staff, use the [corporate office complaint record template \(PDF, 1.3 MB\)](#) to record complaints. Actions taken and/or escalation details once the complaint is finalised must be recorded on the [corporate complaint register \(XLSX, 65.0 KB\)](#). Complaint registers must be kept in business units.

In instances when the complaint is easily resolved over the phone or by front line staff, recording of the issue may not be required. Staff may, however, wish to record a brief note of these issues and the resolution to monitor any potential ongoing issues or trends. If unsure, seek advice from your line manager or leadership staff.

Level 2 complaint management – responsibilities of CFU

CFU is responsible for:

- actively liaising with schools and preschools to help all parties to explore appropriate options for resolution, once all avenues to resolve have been exhausted at the local level
- providing advice on request to corporate office staff regarding complaint actions, resolution options and escalation points
- gathering, analysing and reporting on CFU complaint and feedback data.

CFU use 7 stages for central complaint management:

Receive and acknowledge

On receipt of a complaint to the CFU an officer will:

- acknowledge within 2 working days of receipt
- register the complaint or feedback and supporting information and be assigned to the complaint case
- contact the customer within 2 business days of acknowledgement to confirm details of the complaint (or feedback) ensuring it is clearly understood and:
 - explain the complaint process (including approximate timeframes)
 - clarify what outcome they are seeking
 - advise when they will likely hear back from the officer.

Assess

The CFU officer will consider:

- whether the complaint falls within scope of the complaint management policy or needs to be redirected elsewhere
- whether reasonable efforts (as outlined in this procedure's [school and preschool staff responsibilities](#) section) have been made to resolve the complaint at the local level in the first instance, and if not, refer the customer to the school/preschool for resolution
- whether the determination at the school/preschool level is consistent with department policy and procedure
- whether there are factors that should raise the priority of the complaint or there are timeframes that cannot be altered
- the outcome sought and determine if this is possible in the circumstances and explain why if it's not and offer other solutions.

Plan

The CFU officer will:

- identify whether the resolution needs to be managed by another division
- note any special considerations that apply to the complaint eg sensitive information and/or special supports required
- seek cultural advice if necessary
- estimate the time it may take to resolve the complaint
- identify steps involved and who more information should be requested from.

Gather and review information

The CFU officer will:

- weigh up facts and contentions in support of a complaint
- access and collect timely information from school, preschool, education office and other relevant sources. Requested information must be received by CFU within 3 days to enable a timely response to the customer, unless negotiated otherwise
- review the steps taken by the school/preschool to resolve the complaint, confirming compliance with departmental policies, procedures and regulatory framework
- apply confidentiality and privacy obligations
- update the customer on steps and provide an opportunity for comment
- seek advice from the CFU manager on complex and sensitive matters. The CFU manager will assess and escalate matters to appropriate business areas and executives as needed.

Response and resolution

The CFU officer will:

- provide, in writing or verbally, a clear response to all parties involved (parent, principal) explaining the resolution outcome
- provide progress reports to customers, within 1 week periods, particularly if there are any delays
- apply specialised communication and negotiation techniques, if deemed appropriate. Requests for mediation or a facilitated meeting by CFU, must be forwarded in writing by the customer or school leader to the manager CFU for consideration, outlining the current concerns between parties, why mediation may be effective in this situation, and type of resolution sought
- advise of the resolution proposed or that will be put in place
- advise the customer where the department believes the matter has been given fair consideration and is finalised
- inform relevant principal/preschool director or education director involved, when matter is closed.

Options for redress

The CFU officer will advise the customer of their escalation options if they are not satisfied that their matter has been addressed. This could include an [internal or external review process](#).

Systemic issues

The CFU officer will:

- ensure recording is accurate and timely for reporting purposes
- identify and record the case topic and causal factor to support the improvement of policies, practices and identification of common system and specific site complaint patterns.

When the subject of feedback or a complaint from a customer is about an executive or the CFU, the matter may be forwarded by email to Education.EducationComplaint@sa.gov.au for the attention of the CFU Manager. The CFU manager will assess the complaint and forward to the appropriate senior executive for action.

The CFU is not a disciplinary or investigative body. The CFU does not resolve complaints directly related to a corporate office.

Level 3 complaint management – role of Ombudsman SA (OSA)

If a customer is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint after exhausting level 1 and level 2 avenues within the department, they must be provided with the option to contact and seek independent review from the [Ombudsman SA](#) or another appropriate external body. This may include the [Education Standards Board](#) or the [Teachers Registration Board](#). The circumstances of the complaint will determine whether these options are available.

Roles and responsibilities

Senior Executive Group

Ensure the establishment, maintenance and promotion of an effective and impartial feedback and complaints management system.

Ensure there is a process for regular reporting and to regularly review reports.

Support and link recommendations arising from analysis of complaint handling data in program/policy review and service delivery to improvements.

Leadership staff

Ensure the promotion of an effective feedback and complaint management system.

Ensure corrective action is taken and recorded within area of responsibility.

Support staff members to respond effectively to complaints.

Consider complaint data and systemic issues as part of strategic planning.

Director, Customer and Information Services

Promote a positive culture that values complaint handling.

Integrate feedback and complaint information to support evaluating existing systems or implementing new processes.

Monitor and analyse complaints data.

Report to senior executives to ensure transparency and public accountability.

Ensure continuous training and proper support is available to feedback and complaint handling staff.

Manager, Customer Feedback unit (CFU)

Provide high-level leadership, direction and effective operational management to the CFU.

Provide regular staff supervision. Support, recognise and reward good complaint handling by staff.

Liaise with external and internal key stakeholders on complex and sensitive customer feedback and complaint matters.

Provide high-level policy and operational advice on complaint handling to directors and executives.

All staff

Ensure that they are familiar with the complaint management system and local complaint procedures.

Help customers who wish to make complaints and document as per school/department processes.

Definitions

complaint management system

Encompasses all aspects of the policies, procedures, practices, staff and infrastructure used by the department in the management of complaints.

complaint

An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an agency, relating to its products, services, employees or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

Customer Feedback unit (CFU)

Manages level 2 complaints, feedback and customer service enquiries made by a parent, guardian or community member who is directly affected by a decision or action taken by a school or preschool.

customer

Parent or community member directly affected by a decision or action of the department.

enquiry

A request for information or assistance, where a response is expected, without an expression of dissatisfaction about a service or action.

feedback

An opinion, comment or expression of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly to or about the agency, about its products, services, employees or its handling of a complaint. A response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. Feedback can be either positive or negative.

leadership staff

Preschool director, principal, deputy principal, delegated site leader, supervisor, manager, director, member of leadership group.

mediation

Intervention between conflicting parties to promote reconciliation, settlement, or compromise.

original decision maker

The employee who made the original decision.

Ombudsman of South Australia (OSA)

An independent agency that investigates complaints made about government agencies.

Supporting information

Related legislation

[Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017](#)

[Children's Protection Act 1993](#)

[Education Regulations 2012](#)

[Education and Early Childhood Services Regulations 2011](#)

[Freedom of Information Act 1991](#)

[State Records Act 1997](#)

[Teachers Registration and Standards Act 2004](#)

Related policy documents

[Complaint management policy](#)

[Complaint resolution for employees policy \(PDF, 443.6 KB\)](#)

[Information Privacy Principles Instructions](#)

[Assault – site responsibilities procedure](#)

[Raising a complaint with the Department for Education](#)

[Managing trespass and misbehaviour procedure \(PDF, 535.2 KB\)](#)

Record history

Published date: February 2020

Approvals

File number: 18/42506

Status: approved

Version: 2.0

Policy officer: manager, Customer Feedback unit

Policy sponsor: director, Customer and Information Services directorate

Responsible executive director: chief operating officer, Office of the Chief Executive

Approved by: chief operating officer, Office of the Chief Executive

Approval date: 6 December 2019

Review date: 6 December 2022

Revision record

Version: 18/42506 v2.0

Approved by: chief operating officer

Approved date: 6 December 2019

Review date: 6 December 2022

Amendment(s): Major edit – new branding applied to document, published as HTML document on EDi, edited for plain English in consultation with Communications directorate.improve clarity of responsibilities

Version: v1.2

Approved by: director, customer and information services

Approved date: 25 October 2018

Review date: 31 December 2018

Amendment(s): Minor edit – to reflect the repeal of the Children’s Protection Act 1993 on 22 October 2018 and edits to update manager title to ‘Customer Feedback’.

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[Request an accessible format of information on this page.](#)