



# VET : Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

## Contents

Purpose.....	1
Definitions .....	1
1. Nature of complaints and appeals .....	2
2. Principles of resolution .....	2
3. Timeframes for resolution .....	3
4. Records of complaints and appeals .....	3
5. Making a complaint or appeal .....	3
6. Resolution of complaints and appeals .....	3
7. Independent parties.....	3
8. External complaint avenues .....	4
9. Publication.....	5
Procedures .....	5
1. Complaints management.....	5
2. Appeals management.....	6
3. Reviews by independent party .....	7
4. External complaint or appeal .....	8
Document Control.....	8

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to outline Pines Learning's approach to managing dissatisfaction, formal complaints and appeals of VET students, clients, staff and other members of the community. It provides a transparent approach for all complaints and appeals to be addressed in a fair, efficient and confidential manner.

This policy and procedure ensure compliance with Standard 6 of the Standards.

## Definitions

**Appeal** means a request for a decision made by Pines Learning to be reviewed.

**Complaint** means a person's formal expression of dissatisfaction with any product or service provided by Pines Learning

**Contract** means the VET Funding Contract for the Skills First Program issued by the Department.

**Department** means the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

**Services** means training, assessment, related educational and support services and/or activities related to the recruitment of prospective learners. It does not include services such as student counselling, mediation or ICT support.

**SRTOs** means the Standards for RTOs 2015 – refer definition of 'Standards'.

**Standards** means the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 of the VET Quality Framework which can be accessed from [www.asqa.gov.au](http://www.asqa.gov.au) .



# VET : Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

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## Policy

### 1. Nature of complaints and appeals

- Pines Learning responds to all allegations involving the conduct of:
  - The RTO, its trainers and assessors and other staff.
  - Any third-party providing Services on behalf of Pines Learning
  - Any student or client of Pines Learning
- Complaints may be made in relation to any of Pines Learning's services and activities such as:
  - the application and enrolment process
  - marketing information
  - the quality of training and assessment provided
  - training and assessment matters, including student progress, student support and assessment requirements
  - the way someone has been treated
  - the actions of another student
- An appeal is a request for a decision made by Pines Learning to be reviewed. Decisions may have been about:
  - course admissions
  - refund assessments
  - response to a complaint
  - assessment outcomes / results
  - other general decisions made by Pines Learning

### 2. Principles of resolution

- Pines Learning is committed to developing a procedurally fair complaints and appeals process that is carried out free from bias, following the principles of natural justice. Through this policy and procedure, Pines Learning ensures that complaints and appeals:
  - Are responded to in a consistent and transparent manner.
  - Are responded to promptly, objectively, with sensitivity and confidentiality.
  - Are able to be made at no cost to the individual.
  - Are used as an opportunity to identify potential causes of the complaint or appeal and take actions to prevent the issues from recurring as well as identifying any areas for improvement.
- Pines Learning will inform all persons or parties involved in any allegations made as well as providing them with an opportunity to present their side of the matter.
- Nothing in this policy and procedure limits the rights of an individual to take action under Australia's Consumer Protection laws and it does not circumscribe an individual's rights to pursue other legal remedies.
- Where a student chooses to access this policy and procedure, Pines Learning will maintain the student's enrolment while the complaints/appeals handling process is ongoing.



# VET : Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

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## 3. Timeframes for resolution

Complaints and appeals will be finalised as soon as practicable or at least within 30 calendar days unless there is a significant reason for the matter to take longer. In matters where additional time is needed, the complainant or appellant will be advised in writing of the reasons and will be updated weekly on the progress of the matter until such a time that the matter is resolved.

## 4. Records of complaints and appeals

Pines Learning will maintain a record of all complaints and appeals and their outcomes on the *Complaints and Appeals Register*, which will be securely stored according to the Privacy Policy and Procedures.

## 5. Making a complaint or appeal

- Complaints about a particular incident should be made within ninety (90) calendar days of the incident occurring and appeals must be made within thirty (30) calendar days of the original decision being made.
- Complaints and appeals must be made in writing using the *Complaints and Appeals Form*, or other written format and sent to Pines Learning attention to the coordinator/General Manager or President of the Board.
- When making a complaint or appeal, provide as much information as possible to enable Pines Learning to investigate and determine an appropriate solution. This should include:
  - The issue you are complaining about or the decision you are appealing – describe what happened and how it affected you.
  - Any evidence you have to support your complaint or appeal.
  - Details about the steps you have already taken to resolve the issue.
  - Suggestions about how the matter might be resolved.
- All complaints and appeals will be acknowledged in writing via email or post within 7 days.

## 6. Resolution of complaints and appeals

- Some or all members of the management team of Pines Learning will be involved in resolving complaints and appeals as outlined in the procedures.
- Where a complaint or appeal involves another individual or organisation, they will be given the opportunity to respond to any allegations made.
- Where a third party delivering Services on behalf of the RTO is involved, they will be included in the process of resolving the complaint or appeal.
- In the case of an assessment appeal, an assessor who is independent from the original decision will assess the original task again. The outcome of this assessment will be the result granted for the assessment task.

## 7. Independent parties

- Pines Learning acknowledges the need for an appropriate independent party to be appointed to review a matter where this is requested by the complainant or appellant and the internal processes have failed to resolve the matter. Costs associated with independent parties to review a matter must be covered by the complainant/appellant unless the decision to include an independent party was made by Pines Learning
- Pines Learning may also appoint the independent party to be involved in the resolution of a complaint or appeal where it is deemed necessary.



## VET : Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

- The independent party recommended by Pines Learning is Adult Community Education (such as ANHLC and/or AceVic), the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission or the Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria, however complainants and appellants are able to use their own external party at their own cost.
- Pines Learning will provide complete cooperation with the external mediator investigating the complaint/appeal and will be bound by the recommendations arising out of this process.
- The CEO will ensure that any recommendations made are implemented within twenty (20) days of being notified of the recommendations. The complainant or appellant will also be formally notified in writing of the outcome of the mediation.

### VCAL Students

- After exhausting Pines Learning's complaints procedure, students may lodge a complaint to the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).
- The complaints must be lodged in writing within 12 months of the date of the facts giving rise to the complaint and can be received through the VRQA online complaints portal, via emails to the various VRQA email accounts, through fax and via the post.
- Further details are set out in the VRQA Complaints Management Procedure using the following link:
- <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/apprenticeships/Pages/disputes-and-complaints.aspx>

### 8. External complaint avenues

- Pines Learning agrees to respond to and cooperate in good faith with any complaints handling mechanism or process established by ASQA or the Department from time to time for the purpose of resolving student complaints or other issues in relation to the delivery of services.

- Complaints can be made externally through the following avenues:

- National Training Complaints Hotline:

The National Training Complaints Hotline is a national service for consumers to register complaints concerning vocational education and training. The service refers consumers to the appropriate agency/authority/jurisdiction to assist with their complaint. Consumers can register a complaint with the National Training Complaints Hotline by:

- Phone: 13 38 73, Monday - Friday, 8am to 6pm nationally.
- Email: [ntch@education.gov.au](mailto:ntch@education.gov.au)

For more information about the National Training Complaints Hotline, refer to the following webpage <https://www.dewr.gov.au/national-training-complaints-hotline>

- Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA):

Complainants may also complain to Pines Learning's RTO's registering body: Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

However, ASQA will only use the information you provide to inform its regulatory approach and will not contact Pines Learning on behalf of the complainant or act as their advocate. For more information, refer to the following webpage: <http://www.asqa.gov.au/complaints/make-a-complaint---domestic-students/make-a-complaint---domestic-students1.html>

- Department of Education and Training

Complaints relating to government funded training under the Skills First Funding Contract can be made to the Department of Education and Training. The Department is principally concerned with complaints regarding RTO misconduct including unethical and fraudulent practices. If a party wishes to make a complaint to the Department, they can do so by:



# VET : Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

- Downloading the Department’s complaint form, available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/compliancecomplain.aspx>; and
- Returning the completed form to the following email address [vtg.feedback@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:vtg.feedback@edumail.vic.gov.au); or
- Alternatively, the party can post the completed complaint form to:  
Deputy Secretary, Higher Education and Skills Group  
c/- Executive Director, Training Market Operations  
GPO Box 4367  
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

## 9. Publication

- This policy and procedure will be published in the Student Handbook and on Pines Learning’s website in accordance with its *Marketing and Advertising Policy and Procedure* and to ensure it is publicly available.

## Procedures

### 1. Complaints management

Procedure	Responsibility
<p><b>A. Receive and acknowledge complaint</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As per policy, complaints are to be made in writing by the complainant, attention General Manager.</li> <li>• The General Manager should review all complaints upon receipt.</li> <li>• Acknowledge receipt of complaint in writing by sending a letter to complainant within 3 working days of receipt. Use <i>Complaint/ Appeal Acknowledgement Letter</i>.</li> <li>• Record details of the complaint on the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i>.</li> </ul>	General Manager
<p><b>Investigate the complaint</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upon receiving the complaint, the matter is to be investigated to ensure all relevant information is available and it is accurate and complete.</li> <li>• Further details from the complainant, respondent or other involved parties may be requested during this stage. This may be in writing, over the phone, or face-to-face.</li> <li>• If the matter is in relation to a third party delivering Services on behalf of the RTO, the third party should be involved in the resolution of the complaint.</li> <li>• The General Manager will review the information and decide on an appropriate response. Where deemed necessary by the General Manager, the matter may be reviewed by other members of the management team to arrive at an appropriate resolution.</li> <li>• Note: The complaint must be completely resolved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the original complaint. If the matter is particularly complex and it is going to take longer to resolve, the complainant is to be advised in writing along</li> </ul>	General Manager



# VET : Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

Procedure	Responsibility
with reasons for the extra time. They must be provided with updates on progress on a weekly basis thereafter until the matter is resolved.	
<p><b>B. Advise of the outcome and update records</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a written response to the complainant outlining: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The RTO's understanding of the complaint</li> <li>– The steps taken to investigate and resolve the complaint</li> <li>– Decisions made about resolution, with reasons for the decisions made</li> <li>– Areas that have been identified as possible causes of the complaint and improvements to be recommended</li> <li>– Their right to access the appeals process if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaints process.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Update the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i> so it includes the outcome of the complaint.</li> <li>• Update the <i>Continuous Improvement Register</i> if applicable for any improvements to be made as an outcome.</li> <li>• Keep a copy of the complaint and supporting documents in the Complaints file and in the student or staff file (where relevant).</li> </ul>	General Manager or their delegate
<p><b>C. Review complaints</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the complaints process and its outcome at the next management meeting to consider whether there are any improvements to be made to prevent recurrence. (Refer to CG3 for procedure).</li> </ul>	Management team

## 2. Appeals management

Procedure	Responsibility
<p><b>A. Receive and acknowledge appeal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upon receipt of a request for an appeal, acknowledge receipt of appeal in writing by sending a letter to appellant within 3 working days of receipt to ensure appellant receives it within 7 days. Use <i>Complaint/Appeal Acknowledgement Letter</i>.</li> <li>• Record details of appeal on the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i>.</li> </ul>	General Manager or delegate
<p><b>B. Respond to assessment appeals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the case of appeals against assessment decisions, the original assessment decision will be reviewed by having an assessor independent of the original decision, mark the assessment task again.</li> <li>• The assessment decision made during the appeals process will be considered the actual assessment outcome for the task.</li> <li>• Advise the student of the outcome of the appeal as per point G below.</li> </ul>	General Manager, VET Manager or their delegate



# VET : Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

Procedure	Responsibility
<p><b>C. Respond to appeals against non-academic decisions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upon receiving the appeal, the matter is to be investigated to identify the original decision made and the reasons for the decision.</li> <li>• Further details from the appellant, respondent, the person who made the original decision, or other involved parties may be requested during this stage. This may be in writing, over the phone, or face-to-face.</li> <li>• If the matter is in relation to a third party delivering Services on behalf of the RTO, the third party should be involved in the resolution of the appeal.</li> <li>• The appellant may request for an independent party (mediator) to be involved in the process. Where this is requested by the appellant, they will bear the costs associated. Additionally, Pines Learning may decide to call upon an independent mediator to assist to resolve the issue where a decision cannot be reached internally. This will be at Pines Learning’s cost.</li> <li>• Pines Learning’s Management team will review all relevant information and decide on an appropriate response.</li> <li>• Note: The appeal must be resolved within 60 calendar days of receipt of the original appeal. If the matter is particularly complex and it is going to take longer to resolve, the appellant must be advised in writing along with reasons for the extra time. They must be provided with progress updates on a weekly basis thereafter until the matter is resolved.</li> </ul>	<p>Management team</p>
<p><b>D. Advise appellant of the outcome and update records</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a written response to the appellant outlining: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The RTO’s understanding of the reasons for the appeal</li> <li>– The steps taken to investigate and resolve the appeal</li> <li>– Decisions made about resolution and reasons for the decisions</li> <li>– Areas that have been identified as possible causes of the appeal and improvements to be recommended</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Update the <i>Complaints and Appeals Register</i> so it includes the outcome of the appeal.</li> <li>• Update the <i>Continuous Improvement Register</i> if applicable for any improvements to be made as an outcome.</li> <li>• Keep a copy of the appeal and supporting documents in the Appeals file and in the student or staff file (where relevant).</li> </ul>	<p>General Manager or delegate</p>
<p><b>E. Review appeals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the appeal and its outcome at the next management meeting to consider whether there are any improvements to be made to prevent recurrence.</li> </ul>	<p>Management team</p>

### 3. Reviews by independent party



# VET : Complaints and Appeals Policy & Procedure

Procedure	Responsibility
<p><b>A. Appoint and cooperate with mediator/ independent party</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A complainant or appellant may request that an independent party is involved in resolution of the matter. The independent party may use the RTO's selected mediator or may seek their own at their cost.</li> <li>• The CEO may also decide that an independent party is required to resolve particularly complex matters or in situations where there may be bias.</li> <li>• Contact independent mediator to arrange mediation/ review.</li> <li>• Pines Learning will co-operate fully in the process of the external party reviewing and investigating matter. This will include providing access to the relevant information surrounding the complaint or appeal and the internal complaints records where permitted to do so by law.</li> <li>• All staff must cooperate in such instances and to give an accurate account of the events as they understand them.</li> </ul>	Staff as required

## 4. External complaint or appeal

Procedure	Responsibility
<p><b>A. External complaint or appeal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If dissatisfied with the internal processes, the complainant/appellant may initiate an external complaint or appeal.</li> <li>• If requested, Pines Learning will respond as necessary. Pines Learning agrees to respond to and cooperate in good faith with any complaints handling mechanism or process established by ASQA or the Department from time to time for the purpose of resolving student complaints or other issues in relation to the delivery of services.</li> <li>• All records will be kept on file.</li> <li>• Fully co-operate with external party to respond to the complaint as required.</li> <li>• Discuss the external process and its outcome at the next management meeting to consider whether there are any improvements to be made to prevent recurrence.</li> </ul>	Staff as required

### Document Control

Version	Date	Reason for Change	Prepared by	Approved by
3.0	March 2020		Compliance Manager	General Manager
3.1	July 2022	Updated for 2022 Skills First contract changes	External Consultant	