

DEPARTMENT FOR INNOVATION AND SKILLS POLICY

Complaints Management

Policy Statement

The Department for Innovation and Skills (**DIS**) is committed to the highest standards of customer service. DIS is committed to the management of feedback and complaints in a manner that is fair, courteous, respectful, and consistent with the principles of natural justice and equity of access.

DIS promotes a culture that values complaints as an opportunity for improvement, and links service delivery improvements directly to feedback.

Our culture of customer service excellence is built on continuously improving leadership, knowledge, empowerment and enhancing our skills. We proactively use feedback and complaints to drive improvements to our systems and the way we work, and to support us in evolving our customer experience, services, and behaviours.

This policy conforms to the principles of the Australian/New Zealand Standard: Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations (AS/NZS10002:2014) (**the Standard**), the [Commonwealth Ombudsman Complaint Management Framework](#), and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet Circular [PC039 – Complaint Management in the South Australian Public Sector](#).

Policy Scope

The Complaints Management Policy (**the Policy**) is applicable to all DIS employees and contractors who receive, manage, investigate, and respond to complaints and feedback from members of the public. This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Complaints Management Procedure.

For matters concerning complaints about fraud, corruption, misconduct and maladministration, please refer to the [DIS Fraud Control Policy](#) and [Public Interest Disclosure Procedure](#).

For matters relating to the [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017](#), please refer separately to the DIS Child Safe Environments Policy.

Should a complaint be related to a Critical Incident, please refer to the [Critical Incident Management Procedure](#).

The South Australian Skills Commission (**SASC**) also provides a dedicated complaint handling, mediation and advocacy service for disputes or grievances between parties relating to apprenticeships and traineeships, vocational education and training, higher education and international education. For more information please refer to the [South Australian Skills Standards #12 Complaint Handling, Mediation and Advocacy](#) or the SASC website skillscommission.sa.gov.au

Purpose

The Policy establishes a uniform approach in the management of feedback and complaints across DIS, including staff responsibilities. It aims to support our commitment to diversity and inclusion and to enhance the transparency and responsiveness of the complaint handling process.

The Policy seeks to ensure:

- Increased customer satisfaction with DIS services, policies, and products;
- A fair, efficient, and transparent approach to feedback and complaints;
- Respect for the privacy of the complainant; and
- Improved processes and services arising from customer feedback.

Feedback and complaints can be received through online forms, letters, telephone calls or in person. Social media platforms are not considered suitable for managing complaints and matters will be acknowledged, but then customers will be re-directed to DIS's formal Feedback and Complaints webform.

Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Customer	Individuals or organisations (internal or external to government) who receive or utilise our services, or are directly affected by DIS services, policies, or products.
Complaint	Expression of dissatisfaction related to DIS services, policies, or products where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.
Complainant	Person, organisation, or their representative (including clients, consumers, service users, customers, etc.) making a complaint.
Complaint Management System	Encompasses all policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used for the management of complaints.
Complaint Management Officer	Nominated representative from each Group to coordinate and triage matters to Investigating Officers, ensure matters are promptly actioned and recorded and liaises with the Central Feedback Response Officer.
Compliment	Positive feedback on the quality of service, policies or products provided.

Term	Definition
Dispute	Unresolved complaint escalated internally or externally, or both.
DIS Central Register	Captures all feedback received via the online webform to ensure matters are recorded, monitored and actioned in accordance to the policy, as well as for annual reporting and business improvement purposes.
Feedback	Opinion, comment or expression of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly, or implicitly about DIS services, policies or products or its handling of a complaint. A response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.
General Enquiry	Question seeking general information about DIS services, policies and products.
Investigating Officer	Nominated by the group CMO, to undertake thorough investigation of the matter, ensure documentation is kept and stored and appropriate recommendations and response are prepared.
Public Officer	Includes public sector employees and contractors performing contract work for a public authority or the Crown.
Request for Assistance	Seeking assistance with a task (eg. navigating websites, acquiring information, accessing online portals, application queries or asking a specific question).
Suggestion	Idea, proposal, piece of advice or opinion for consideration in improving a service, policy or product.

Responsibilities

The [Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector](#) (Code of Ethics) requires all public-sector employees to comply with the principles and values of public sector behaviour. Public officers are to exhibit the highest standards of professional conduct in undertaking their duties. The responsibilities of management and staff are outlined below.

Title	Responsibility
Chief Executive	Promotes a culture of valuing feedback and complaints and ensures the Policy is effectively implemented. Supports the use of complaints and feedback data to drive a continuous improvement approach across DIS. Ensures the number and type of complaints received each year and related service improvements is reported in DIS's Annual Report in accordance with DPC Circular PC013 – Annual Reporting Requirements
Executive Directors/Directors	Ensures the Policy and supporting tools are accessible and promoted to staff and customers; complaints and feedback data is recorded and analysed; and related service improvements implemented and reported on.
Managers/Senior Staff	Ensures complaints and feedback in their areas are handled in accordance with the Policy and supporting procedures. They appoint, empower and train staff to effectively resolve complaints and provide support and advice where required.
Complaints Management Officers (CMO)	Complies with the Policy, procedures, and any related local guidelines. Respond promptly to complaints, aim to provide resolutions in a timely manner and record outcomes for reporting purposes. Must assess and identify immediately if the matter is to be dealt with under this Policy or whether it is to be referred to the relevant contact person under the appropriate DIS policy or procedure.
Investigating Officers	Comply with the Policy, procedures, and any related local guidelines. Investigate and respond promptly to complaints, aim to provide resolutions in a timely manner and record outcomes for reporting purposes.
Staff	Comply with the Policy, procedures, and any related local guidelines.

DIS Central Response Officer	Triages the matter to the relevant CMO and monitors to ensure that a response is provided to the complainant within 10 days. Ensures accurate capture in the DIS Central Register, recording of outcomes and regular reporting.
-------------------------------------	---

Complaints and Feedback

DIS follows the three-level model for handling feedback and complaints; early resolution, escalated and external. Refer to the Complaints Management Procedure for further detail.

Principles and Standards

The Code of Ethics requires all public-sector employees to comply with the South Australian public sector values. All complaints will be investigated in a manner that upholds and champions those values and aligns with the DIS People Plan 2019-22.

Our Complaints Management Standards

1. We will ensure customers are able to easily contact or submit or provide a complaint or feedback orally or in writing and have access to information about external reviews such as those undertaken by the Ombudsman's office. Customers will be provided with information about the process on our website.
2. Where contact details are provided, we will acknowledge all forms of feedback within **3 working days**.
3. We will log and record all feedback and complaints in Content Manager records management system.
4. We will resolve complaints that are not of a serious nature and/or not requiring extensive investigation or consultation within **10 working days**.
5. We will provide notice to a complainant within **10 working days** if there is a delay in responding and provide an interim response with an explanation and timeline for when the matter is likely to be resolved. Regular updates on the progress of the complaint will be provided to the complainant.
6. Complainants will not be charged a fee. DIS will take all reasonable steps to ensure that complainants are not adversely affected because of a complaint made by them or on their behalf.
7. We will adopt a customer focused approach and treat our customers with dignity and in an unbiased, non-discriminatory, and fair manner. We are sensitive to individual requirements of the customers, and wherever possible will extend support for those who have unique needs.
8. We will be accountable and undertake continuous and regular monitoring of data to use for service and training improvements.
9. We will not disclose personal information or data in accordance with the State Government [Information and Privacy Principles](#).
10. We will undertake quarterly reviews of the DIS Central register to ensure consistency of application of the Policy and Procedure.

Complaints can be made or assisted by another person or organisation, eg an advocate, family member or community representative. Customers with unique needs or those from minority groups may be offered a call back appropriate to their circumstances.

Process Overview

The major stages in the complaint or feedback process are as follows:

1. Receive the complaint or feedback,
2. Assess the complaint or feedback,
3. Investigate the complaint or feedback,
4. Resolve, respond and record the complaint or feedback, and
5. Continuous improvement of services and processes.

Customers wishing to take the matter further may request a higher-level review by the Department or make a complaint to an external body such as the [Ombudsman SA](#).

All documentation relating to complaints and feedback will be retained in accordance with the [State Records Act 1997](#) and the details of the incoming complaint will be recorded in an approved records management system.

Investigation by the Ombudsman

In the instance when the complainant has lodged a complaint with the Ombudsman, DIS are still required to follow the procedure, complete the investigation and respond to the complainant as per our timeframe of 10 days. The Ombudsman will notify the Department if a complaint has been received and will await the outcome of the DIS investigation before commencing their own investigation.

Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

DIS recognises that a small number of complainants may act unreasonably in seeking to have their concerns addressed. Complainant conduct that involves behaviour which, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for DIS, our staff, and/or other service users is likely to be deemed unreasonable. Unreasonable behaviour by complainants does not preclude valid issues being addressed by DIS.

The Director responsible for the business unit handling the complaint will put in place appropriate strategies for managing unreasonable behaviour in a manner that is fair, reasonable and ethical.

Continuous Improvement of Services and Processes

Once complaints are resolved, the relevant business unit will identify any underlying causes and where necessary implement changes and strategies to services, policies, products and/or systems to reduce the risk of re-occurrence and better meet the expectations of our customers.

Reporting

In accordance with the Premier's Circular [PC013 – Annual Reporting Requirements](#), South Australian government agencies are expected to report annually on complaint data and to address planned system improvements.

Additionally, all feedback data (including complaints, suggestions, compliments, general enquiries and requests for assistance) will be reviewed and analysed quarterly to:

- Identify systemic issues to be addressed to improve performance;
- Identify trends and frequency of repeat complaints;
- Determine resolution of outcomes of complaints;
- Determine improvements to remedy issues; and
- Identify areas of best practice and promote learning.

Trends in numbers and types of feedback, volumes and themes will be collated by the DIS Feedback Officer and reported monthly to the Director, Client Services and Migration for review and/or escalation as appropriate.

Supporting Documents

- DIS Complaint Management Procedure
- [Premier's Circular PC013 – Annual Reporting Requirements](#)
- [Premier's Circular PC039 – Complaint Management in the South Australian Public Sector](#)
- [State Records Act 1997](#)
- [Information Sharing Guidelines](#)
- [Code of Ethics for South Australian Public Sector](#)
- [DPC Circular 039 – Complaint Management in the South Australian Public Sector](#)
- [Ombudsman SA – Audit Survey Report – June 2018](#)

OFFICIAL

- [Premier's Circular PC012 - Information Privacy Principles \(IPPS\) Instruction.](#)
- [Office for Public Integrity](#)
- [Office for Public Integrity – Directions and Guidelines for Public Officers](#)
- DIS Child Safe Environments Policy
- [Critical Incident Management Procedure](#)
- [DIS Fraud Control Policy](#)
- [Conflict of Interest Procedure](#)
- [Public Interest Disclosure Procedure](#)

DOCUMENT CONTROL Approved by: Heather Montgomerie	Title: Director, Client Services and Migration
Team: Client Services and Migration	Contact: Kerry Rodger, Assistant Team Leader, Customer Solutions
Group: Strategy, Policy and People	Email: Skills@sa.gov.au
Version number: 3.0.	Date of approval: 28 February 2022
Content Manager Reference: D20067497	Next review date: February 2025