

Complaint management policy

This is a mandated policy under the operational policy framework and staff are required to adhere to the content. Any edits to this policy must follow the process outlined on the [creating, updating and deleting operational policies page](#) (staff login required).

Overview

The Department for Education (department) promotes and values feedback and works to manage complaints to improve performance, systems and service delivery.

This policy aims to:

- ensure an open, accessible and transparent complaint management system
- ensure feedback, suggestions and complaints are managed effectively, fairly, confidentially and objectively
- inform and identify where service improvements can be made
- provide guidance on key principles and concepts of the complaint management system.

Scope

Complaints managed in line with this policy are those where the customer expresses dissatisfaction about the service or action of the department or its staff and is directly affected.

Detail

The department will maintain an effective and responsive customer feedback and complaint management system (CMS) to support consistent and high-quality management of feedback and complaints.

All complaints will be taken seriously. When complaints are received, they will be assessed, prioritised, documented and recorded. Resolution will occur at a local level (with the original decision maker) wherever able and as quickly as possible.

The department will maintain good communication with customers throughout the process, including prompt acknowledgement, information about expected timeframes, outcomes and avenues of review. The department will explain the basis on which a decision is made.

For specific requirements for schools and preschools about complaint management processes refer to:

- [complaint management and reporting](#)
- [complaint management procedure \(PDF 663 KB\)](#).

Schools and preschools must conform to this policy and the [DPC Circular PC039 Complaint Management in the South Australian Public Sector](#).

A shorter version of this policy is available on the [simplified policies for schools and preschools page \(staff login required\)](#), which can be provided to parents and families.

Guiding Principles

This policy is based on 7 principles:

Commitment

- A commitment to resolving complaints and a culture that recognises an individual's right to complain. Feedback is valued on systems, service delivery, policies and staff. Complaint handling is focused on improvements, reaching a satisfactory outcome, possible review of policy and procedure, and not on assigning blame.

Accessibility

- The provision of a complaints and feedback process that is culturally responsive, accessible and inclusive to everyone, particularly individuals who require assistance.

Transparency

- How to make a complaint, where to complain and how the complaint is handled, is clear and publicly available.

Objectivity and Fairness

- Complaints are addressed with integrity, impartiality, within established timeframes, and assessed and prioritised in an equitable manner.

Privacy

- Feedback and complaint information is handled according to the [Information Privacy Principles Instructions \(PDF 644KB\)](#).

Accountability

- Explanations are provided for decision making and complaint handling performance and subject to internal and external review processes.

Continuous Improvement

- Feedback and complaint data is acted on, learnt from and used to enable the identification of problems and the improvement of services.

Complaints out of scope

Where the complaint relates to a matter that is out of scope of this policy, the customer will be advised and assisted to redirect their complaint to the appropriate authority or service.

This includes:

- employee disputes, grievances and conduct
- non departmental employees
- child protection matters
- private school issues.

More detailed information and who to contact in these cases can be found in [complaints out of scope](#).

How to make a complaint to the department

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. Refer to [raising a complaint with the department \(PDF 231 KB\)](#) for a step by step process.

[Complaint management and reporting](#) outlines the ways a complaint can be made, types of support available and the role of the Customer Feedback Team.

Managing unreasonable customer conduct

The department provides an inclusive and open customer feedback and complaint management process underpinned by the 7 principles outlined in the [guiding principles section of this policy](#).

All customers will be treated with fairness and respect. Behaviour that is aggressive, violent, disrespectful or abusive will not be tolerated.

Staff safety and wellbeing is paramount when dealing with unreasonable behaviour under the department's workforce health and safety and duty of care obligations. There is a need to balance the right for someone to make a complaint with the rights of staff to safety and respect, and the rights of other customers to equal time and resources.

Defining unreasonable conduct

Unreasonable conduct is any behaviour by a customer which, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, wellbeing, resource or equity issues for the department, staff, other service users or the customer themselves. Refer to [unreasonable customer conduct](#) for the 5 categories of unreasonable customer conduct.

[Complaint management and reporting](#) outlines how unreasonable conduct will be managed by the department.

Privacy

The department's disclosure of personal information is governed by the Government of South Australia's [Information Privacy Principles \(IPPs\) \(PDF 644KB\)](#) and [Information Sharing Guidelines \(ISG\) \(PDF 13.6MB\)](#).

In some instances when it is believed that a child or person is at risk of harm, information will be shared with third party service providers in accordance with the ISG and the [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017](#).

When responding to a complaint, personal details or details of the complaint may need to be disclosed to other departmental staff on an as-needed basis or to the [Ombudsman SA](#) on request. Only de-identified data is used for public reporting to protect the privacy of individuals.

Roles and responsibilities

Senior Executive Group

Promote a culture that values feedback and complaints and their effective resolution.

Ensure the department maintains an effective complaint management system.

Provide leadership and oversight to the complaint management system within their division, ensuring procedures and processes are in place and that all customer feedback and complaints are recorded, responded to and managed appropriately, and in a manner consistent with this policy.

Ensure escalation and internal review processes are in place within divisions.

Identify opportunities and systemic issues, and implement corrective actions and improvements.

Provide central support and coordination for the department's complaint management system, including corporate policy, reporting and performance monitoring.

Principals, preschool directors, education directors, directors

Clearly communicate to staff their responsibilities and requirements, including policy and procedures, related to complaints and feedback.

Ensure that information about the complaint management system is easily accessible at school and preschools and data is reported annually and available on request.

Provide oversight to the operations of the complaint management system in their responsible business area/s.

Consider data and systemic issues as part of strategic planning.

Director, Customer and Information Services

Establish a robust process to manage, monitor and report on customer feedback and complaints managed by Customer Feedback.

Monitor, review and evaluate this policy and ensure it is accessible to the public on the department website.

Manager, Customer Feedback

Provide high-level leadership, direction and effective operational management of the Customer Feedback Team.

Liaise with key stakeholders on departmental complaint management practice.

Provide high-level complaint management policy and operational advice to executives.

All Staff

Ensure they are familiar with the policy and act accordingly.

Understand and comply with the department's complaint management system.

Help people who wish to make complaints and document in line with local 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

A complaint is 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

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

Customer Feedback

A central team that manages level 2 complaints related to schools and preschools received from a parent, guardian or community member who is directly affected by a decision or action taken and department feedback.

facilitated negotiation

Parties to a dispute identify the issues they want to negotiate. The Facilitator may advise on or determine the process of facilitation.

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.

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.

Record history

Published date: August 2021

Approvals

OP number: 036

File number: 20/09900

Status: approved

Version: 2.4

Policy Officer: Manager, Operational Policy and Customer Feedback

Policy sponsor: Director, Customer and Information Services

Responsible Executive Director: Chief Operating Officer, Office for the Chief Executive

Approved by: A/Director, Customer and Information Services

Approval date: 24 August 2021

Review date: 24 August 2024

Revision record

Version: 2.4

Approved by: A/Director, Customer and Information Services

Approval date: 24 August 2021

Review date: 24 August 2024

Amendment(s): clarified the definition of the Customer Feedback Team.

Version: 2.3

Approved by: Director, Customer and Information Services

Approval date: 23 February 2021

Review date: 23 February 2024

Amendment(s): added information about support persons and advocates into the 'support to make a complaint' webpage and updated hyperlinks.

Version: v2.2

Approved by: A/Director, Customer and Information Services

Approval date: 18 November 2020

Review date: 18 November 2023

Amendment(s): updated hyperlinks and added policy version number to critical policy webpages.

Version: v2.1

Approved by: Director, Customer and Information Services

Approval date: 13 May 2020

Review date: 13 May 2023

Amendment(s): edits to reflect new changes to the Act 2019 and Regulation 2020.

Version: v2.0

Approved by: Chief Operating Officer, Office for the Chief Executive

Approved date: 6 December 2019

Review date: 6 December 2022

Amendment(s): major edit – including addition of unreasonable conduct and guiding principles. New branding applied to document, published as HTML document on public site, edited for plain English in consultation with Communications Directorate.

Version: v1.0

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'.

General enquiries

Phone: 8226 1000

Free call: 1800 088 158

Email: education.customers@sa.gov.au