Complaints Procedure (Student and Public)

Section 1 - Summary

(1) This Procedure:

a. outlines the steps Victoria University (VU or University) staff will follow in handling complaints raised by current and former VU students, members of the public or third parties; and,
b. reflects VU's commitment to person-centred and trauma-informed practice, ensuring complaints are handled with sensitivity, respect, and a focus on safety and wellbeing—supported by staff training, minimising re-traumatisation, offering choice and control, and upholding cultural safety, confidentiality, and privacy.

Section 2 - Scope

(2) This Procedure may be used by:

a. Current and former (within six months of a students last enrolment) VU students, provided that the complaint relates to matters that occurred while they were enrolled at VU;
b. Members of the public or third parties, which may include clients of University services, campus users, prospective students, partners, vendors, visitors, alumni, contractors, and community stakeholders.

(3) This Procedure will not apply to any decision regarding a student that has been made under a policy or procedure that contains its own internal review mechanism. However, a student may make a complaint if they believe that the relevant policy or procedure was not properly followed.

(4) Complaints about inappropriate conduct or behaviour may be managed in accordance with the Student Misconduct Regulations 2019 or other relevant policies as appropriate.

(5) Complainants may submit a complaint through the VU Complaints Portal, in writing (see Clause 20) or by email to integrity.office@vu.edu.au

Section 3 - Policy/Regulation

(6) Complaints Policy

Section 4 - Procedures

Part A - Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities
Students	Behaving in accordance with the principles of the Student Conduct Policy, Student Charter and all other related policies Maintaining appropriate confidentiality at all times throughout the complaints process Complying with any interim or final controls or measures put in place
Staff	Where possible, identifying and addressing matters before they escalate to formal complaints Responding in a timely manner to all issues and complaints brought to their attention Liaising with the Student Complaints and Integrity Office to seek advice when required Ensuring that they remain impartial and maintaining appropriate confidentiality throughout the complaints process Keeping a clear record of actions taken, including informal steps, to ensure transparency and accountability Apply person-centered and trauma-informed approaches when engaging with complainants and respondents and provide any person who makes a disclosure with information or a referral to appropriate service for support, reporting and investigation
Student Complaints and Integrity Office (SCIO)	Liaising with and supporting complainants throughout the complaints process Liaising with subject matter experts (SMEs) for accurate and timely advice Appointing facilitators and investigators where required Communicating determinations through the provision of complaint outcomes Providing information and advice to students and the public as needed Apply person-centered and trauma-informed approaches when engaging with complainants and respondents and provide any person who makes a disclosure with information or a referral to appropriate service for support, reporting and investigation Be mindful that they may be the first person a complaint has been disclosed to and ensure trauma-informed practices are applied, including minimising repeated disclosures, offering choices in how to engage, and tailoring support to individual needs
Senior Manager, Student Complaints and Integrity	Determining where to withdraw service where appropriate Determining where a complaint may be frivolous or vexatious

Part B - Overview

(7) All formal complaints are submitted through the central VU Complaints Portal managed by the SCIO. Once lodged, the SCIO will assess the complaint and either:

a. Manage the matter directly in accordance with the Complaints Policy and this procedure; or
b. Refer the matter to a more appropriate internal process (e.g. academic misconduct, student progress, whistleblower disclosures).

(8) VU may implement interim measures at any stage of the complaints process to protect the safety and wellbeing of students and staff. Such measures may include reasonable adjustments and reasonable directions relating to communication and engagement between parties.

(9) At VU's discretion, student and public complaints involving multiple issues may be dealt with either collectively or individually.

(10) Complaints will be managed under the student process if lodged whilst a student is enrolled or within six months of a student's last enrolment. Complaints outside of this timeframe will be managed through the public complaints process below.

(11) Complaints involving Gender-Based Violence will be referred to support services in line with the Gender-based Violence Policy and may be managed through the process outlined in the Student Misconduct Procedure.

(12) Complaints involving Gender-Based Violence will be managed by staff with appropriate training, and may require

coordinated risk assessments, tailored support plans, and/or distinct response pathways.

(13) All student complainants will be provided with information regarding available support services such as Student Advocacy.

Part C - Local Level Resolution (Students)

(14) Where they feel comfortable to and it is appropriate to do so, students are expected to make genuine attempts to resolve matters through informal means. Informal resolution does not require a written complaint and may involve direct communication between the student and the individual(s) concerned.

(15) When concerns are raised with a staff member, they should endeavor to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of all parties. If they can resolve the complaint at a local level, they should email the student with the outcome and basis for that decision. All outcomes implemented must be in line with VU policies.

(16) Staff members who receive student concerns should make genuine attempts to resolve the matter at a local level where appropriate and may refer to the SCIO for support or guidance as required.

(17) Any complaints that appears to contain any element of gender-based violence should be escalated to the Integrity Office for management in line with the Gender-based Violence Policy.

(18) Where the matter is unable to be resolved, students can raise a complaint through the VU Complaints Portal.

(19) Complaints that are not suitable for local level resolution may be raised via the VU Complaints Portal.

Part D - Lodging a Complaint (Students and members of the public)

(20) Complainants may lodge a complaint through the VU Complaints Portal. Those unable to access the online portal may request a hard copy complaint form from the SCIO or through VUHQ. Completed hard copy complaint forms should be emailed to integrity.office@vu.edu.au or posted in a sealed envelope addressed to:

Student Complaints and Integrity Office
Victoria University
PO Box 14428
Melbourne, VIC 8001

(21) In assessing the complaint, the SCIO may:

a. Contact the student and any other party/parties to a complaint in order to gather information or seek to clarify the information relevant to the matter;
b. If appropriate, contact the student to propose that informal resolution be attempted (if it has not been);
c. Provide relevant information, trends and findings arising from the complaint as feedback to the relevant area to support local quality assurance, service improvement, and prevention of recurrence;
d. Refer the matter to a different University process or service if this is more appropriate.

(22) The Senior Manager, Student Complaints and Integrity may dismiss the complaint if it is vexatious, without merit or otherwise represents an abuse of process.

(23) Wherever possible, complainants should be involved in resolving their own matters. If a third party, including a parent, seeks to act on behalf of a complainant, the SCIO will seek written authorisation from the complainant.

(24) A student may request to remain anonymous when submitting a complaint or throughout a complaint investigation. Students will be informed that in certain circumstances such as those listed below, electing to remain

anonymous may restrict the University's ability to assist, or may limit the complaint outcomes available to a student.

a. An anonymous complaint is one where no personal details are provided and the University cannot contact the student or provide updates. This option may assist students who feel unable to be identified, but it potentially limits the University's capacity to investigate or resolve the matter.
b. A withheld identity request means the University knows the student's details and can communicate with them, but their identity is not disclosed to the subject of the complaint or other parties, which may be necessary where there are concerns.

(25) When lodging a complaint, complainants should:

a. Describe the nature of their complaint, with as much detail as is possible including (where relevant) the date and time of events, location, individuals involved, witnesses, and any supporting documents or other evidence;
b. Identify the relevant breach in University policy and procedure, if relevant;
c. Describe any attempts to resolve the matter at a local level or the reasons for bypassing the local level resolution process (for students only); and
d. Propose the outcome(s) sought (not all formal complaints will result in the outcome complainants seek).

Part E - Preliminary assessment and triage (Students and members of the public)

(26) Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 University business days following receipt.

(27) The process of addressing the complaint, including written acknowledgement of a complaint, will begin within 5 University business days of receipt of the written complaint.

(28) When a complaint is lodged, a preliminary assessment and triage is performed by the SCIO. This involves:

a. completing a preliminary risk assessment;
b. ensuring that the complaint does not duplicate or substantially overlap with any legal action underway on the same matter;
c. ensuring that the complaint does not duplicate or substantially overlap with any informal resolution process underway under Part C of this Procedure in relation to the same matter;
d. assessing whether the matter is a valid complaint, or whether it is frivolous, vexatious or lacking substance; and,
e. considering the emotional and psychological safety of all parties, including minimising re-traumatisation by avoiding repeated disclosures.

(29) VU will endeavour to conduct a preliminary assessment of a complaint within 10 working days of receipt, and to conclude investigations within 30 working days, unless the complexity of the matter warrants a longer investigation period.

(30) A complainant may withdraw a complaint at any time.

(31) Where a person holds a dual status as both a student and a staff member, the SCIO will determine the most appropriate process to manage the complaint. Complaints that primarily relate to the individual's employment will be referred to People and Culture for action.

(32) Complaints lodged by former staff members will generally be referred to People and Culture, unless the matter relates to student issues or other matters more appropriately managed by the SCIO.

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(33) In cases where a complaint has been withdrawn, the University retains the right to investigate and address matters raised in that complaint in order to meet its obligations to all students, participants and staff to maintain, as far as is reasonably practicable, a safe and healthy work and study environment. The University makes no undertaking to remove any records of withdrawn complaints and will cease providing communications and updates of ongoing activities to the original complainant on submission of the complaint withdrawal.

(34) All parties to a complaint are entitled to bring a support person to meetings and discussions. A support person can be any person chosen by the party, and cannot be a legal practitioner. The support person's role is to observe the meeting and provide support and guidance, as requested, but they may not speak on behalf of the party they are supporting.

Part F - Complaint Management and Investigation (Students and members of the public)

(35) Where it is determined that investigation of a complaint is required, a staff member from within the SCIO will initiate the complaint investigations process, including:

a. Conducting an initial assessment of the complaint and appointing an investigator;
b. Notifying the parties of the investigation and providing information regarding processes and timelines;
c. Gathering any information required for the investigation, including relevant policies, procedures and protocols; and
d. Managing communications to all parties

(36) If the Senior Manager, Student Complaints and Integrity considers that it is appropriate, another internal or external person may be appointed to conduct the investigation where specialist investigation skills and/or training are required beyond those of the internal SCIO staff or there is a conflict and/or prior involvement in the formal complaint matter.

(37) The SCIO is responsible for identifying and engaging appropriate Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to act as the decision maker and to support the assessment and resolution of complaints. The SCIO will contact the relevant SME(s) directly to gather information, advice, or a determination where appropriate, based on the nature of the matter. In serious or complex circumstances, a complaint may be referred to another area of the University, such as People and Culture and/or Office of the General Counsel. Where this occurs, the SCIO will advise the complainant of the referral and continue to monitor the progress of the complaint and maintain records of the outcome.

(38) SMEs must provide their input in a timely manner (within 10 business days) and clearly indicate any findings, reasons, recommendations, or outcomes that fall within their remit. This input will be taken as accurate and used by the SCIO to prepare a complaint outcome.

(39) All staff members involved in resolving a complaint must ensure that their involvement aligns with the Conflict of Interest Policy.

Part G - Decision-making in Complaint matters (Students and members of the public)

(40) The SCIO is responsible for preparing the written outcome and determination and communicating the decision to the complainant. The SCIO will ensure the communication reflects the decision maker's determination and is clear, accessible, and aligned with the University's policies and complaint handling principles.

(41) Written outcomes will:

a. Summarise the complaint and issues considered;
b. Set out the determination and the reasons for the decision;
c. Outline any actions to be taken by the University; and
d. Provide information on review or appeal options available to the complainant.

(42) Where a complaint is referred to another process for resolution, the SCIO will advise the student of this and, where appropriate, will provide the contact details for the person or area handling the matter.

(43) A formal complaint will be found to be either:

a. Substantiated;
b. Substantiated in part; or,
c. Not substantiated.

(44) A determination that the complaint is substantiated wholly or in part may lead to any combination of the following outcomes, or any other outcome appropriate in the circumstances:

a. Rectification of administrative or academic error;
b. Implementation of negotiated solution;
c. A direction of no contact between parties to the complaint by any means or for any reason;
d. Intervention by appropriate staff member; and/or
e. Referral to another process (e.g. student progress process).

(45) As part of a complaint outcome, the SCIO will provide the complainant with information as to:

a. Whether the complaint has been substantiated or partially substantiated;
b. The proposed resolution of the complaint and the reasons;
c. Their option to appeal the decision internally; and
d. Details of any relevant support services.

(46) The SCIO will advise the student of the outcome of the complaint in writing within 10 business days of the outcome being finalised and will monitor the implementation of the complaint outcome.

Part H - Outcomes of Student Complaints about Staff (Students Only)

(47) It is acknowledged that if a student makes a complaint about a staff member, the student complaints process and the staff disciplinary process may overlap.

(48) The outcome of any staff disciplinary process will generally remain confidential.

(49) Where a staff member's conduct or behaviour is found to have adversely affected a complainant's studies, health or wellbeing, VU will suggest an appropriate remedy or support to the complainant, independent of any staff disciplinary process. The nature of the remedy or support will be guided by the specific concern, the extent of the impact on the complainant, and the outcome the complainant is seeking.

(50) Outcomes of complaints made about staff that involve a staff disciplinary process are not subject to review or appeal.

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Part I - Complaints from Members of the Public

(51) Members of the public can lodge a complaint via the VU Complaints Portal in accordance with the process outlined at Part D above.

(52) Except as set out in this Procedure, the SCIO will manage complaints submitted by members of the public in accordance with this Procedure.

(53) Depending on the subject matter of the complaint, other external complaint avenues may also be available. These include, but are not limited to:

a. The Australian Skills Quality Authority (if a vocational education and training matter).
b. The Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (if a higher education matter).
c. The Victorian Information Commissioner (if a privacy matter).
d. The Health Complaints Commissioner (if a health privacy matter).
e. Victoria Police (if a potential criminal matter).

Part J - Appeal and External Review

Students

(54) A student may appeal the outcome of a complaint on one or more of the grounds set out in clause 6 of the Student Appeals Regulations 2019. Any appeal should be lodged in accordance with the VU Student Appeals Procedure.

(55) Students are encouraged to utilize internal appeals processes before seeking external review.

a. Higher Education students may seek external review of the University's decision-making process by the National Student Ombudsman.
b. TAFE students can seek external review of the University's decision-making process by the Victorian Ombudsman.

(56) Students may also seek a review of decisions and/or lodge complaints through other external bodies such as the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) or the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). These agencies consider matters relating to discrimination, sexual harassment, vilification, victimisation, or breaches of human rights.

(57) If an external body commences an investigation into a complaint, the University will usually suspend any in-progress review or investigation of the same complaint or action taken in relation to the complaint until the external investigation has been completed and all reports (if any) have been issued.

Members of the Public

(58) Members of the public dissatisfied with the outcome of a VU complaint may contact the Victorian Ombudsman (who reviews the University processes for adhering to complaints).

Part K - Data and Reporting

(59) The SCIO will report annually on the data and trends for student and public complaints to Academic Board and other Governance Committees as detailed in the Complaints Policy.

(60) The University will also provide de-identified data to external agencies as required.

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(61) The SCIO is responsible for coordinating and/or implementing any recommendations made by the National Student Ombudsman to the University in relation to Gender-Based Violence complaints.

Section 5 - HESF/ASQA/ESOS Alignment

(62) HESF: Standards 2.4 Student Grievances and Complaints; 6.2 Corporate Monitoring and Accountability (specifically 6.2.1); 7.2 Information for Prospective and Current Students (specifically 7.2.2f); 7.3 Information Management (specifically 7.3.3c).

(63) Outcome Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2025: Standards 2.7, 2.8 Feedback, Complaints and Appeals

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

Section 6 - Definitions

(65) Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction with a decision, action, service, behaviour or process of the University or its representatives, where a response, review or resolution is expected or required.

(66) Complainant: A person who raises a complaint under this Procedure. Complainants may include current or former students, prospective students, or members of the public engaging with VU.

(67) Local Level Resolution: A low-complexity resolution undertaken promptly at the point of service or contact, without escalation, where the matter can be resolved to the complainant’s satisfaction.

(68) Member of the public: This Procedure applies to complaints by members of the public or organisations about the University, its staff, its students, or third parties providing services to or on behalf of the University.

(69) Procedural Fairness: means acting fairly in administrative decision making. It relates to the fairness of the procedure by which a decision is made, and not the fairness in a substantive sense of that decision. Procedural fairness requires that decision making processes are:

a. free from bias or conflict of interest;
b. based on evidence;
c. equitable to all parties, including providing the opportunity for all parties to be heard.

(70) Staff:

a. all employees of the University, on all domestic and offshore locations, including student residences, and while engaged in all work-related activities such as conferences and work-sponsored social occasions;
b. all contractors and consultants performing work on University sites or on behalf of the University;
c. visiting academics, honorary, adjunct and exchange staff;
d. the Council and its committees; and
e. any volunteer in the workplace and study environment.

(71) Student:

a. a person enrolled at the University in a course leading to a degree, diploma, certificate, licence or other award; or

b. a person whose study performance is being or is to be assessed by the University, notwithstanding that such a person is not enrolled at the University in a course leading to a degree, diploma, certificate, licence or other award.

(72) Subject Matter Expert (SME): A University staff member with operational responsibility or relevant expertise who may be contacted by the SCIO team to provide information or advice and a decision that supports complaint resolution.

(73) Support Person: A person who is able to offer support to a complainant, witness or respondent, through attendance or assistance at investigations, interviews or other stages of a complaint. A support person cannot be a legal practitioner.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	18th February 2026
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Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Accountable Officer	Anne Siegers Chief Risk Officer anne.siegers@vu.edu.au
Responsible Officer	April Vocale Student Complaints and Integrity Manager april.vocale@vu.edu.au
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