

# Melbourne Rudolf Steiner Seminar Ltd

**A.C.N. 081 055 110**

RTO 3948 CRICOS 01812M VET Fee-HELP Provider: 7052  
(course code 69801, CRICOS code 071548J)

## **COMMUNICATION POLICY**

### **Including Complaints Handling and Appeals**

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## Policy:

There is an expectation that communication between all members of the Seminar at all times will be open and respectful. This policy provides clear expectations about and guidelines for clear and open communication. In so doing it upholds the well established understanding that good communication respects all parties involved.

This policy/procedure also supports AQTF 2007 Standards in providing a process for complaints and appeals to be heard and actioned where necessary.

It acknowledges that despite all efforts of the Seminar to provide satisfactory services to its staff and students, complaints may occasionally arise that require formal resolution. The following procedures provide students the opportunity to have any issues relating to a substantiated complaint or appeal resolved and resolutions reached that attempt to satisfy all parties involved. This complaints and appeals process will be at no cost to the student.

## Procedure:

### GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION

These guidelines are to facilitate the smooth functioning of the Seminar. The guidelines complement the regular, informal communications that already take place between members of the Seminar community.

#### **Tutor /Student**

- Clear, respectful with definite and well understood boundaries.
- Individual meetings are encouraged at mutually convenient times. If a specific issue is to be discussed, prior notice needs to be provided to allow adequate time for prior preparation.

#### **Tutor to Tutor**

- Tutors to attend meetings as requested to ensure regular and up-to-date information, and to participate in pedagogical study.
- All Tutors to participate in an annual evaluation of the course.

#### **Tutor to Class**

- Clear, respectful, warm, humorous, enthusiastic
- Give clear understanding of what behaviour is expected and required in class by using a well understood group management techniques.

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- To provide appropriate and positive learning experiences that cater for the range of students needs and abilities.
- Sensitive to and able to act upon individual and group needs, both inside and outside the classroom.

## PROCESSES FOR COMMUNICATION

The Seminar uses a number of means to communicate with staff and students including the website, the Seminar Handbook and weekly meetings. The Administration, Tutors and office staff are available for individual appointments.

### Complaints Handling and Appeals

**NOTE: For all complaints relating to VET FEE HELP refer to the *Complaints Handling and Resolution VET FEE Help Policy***

The Seminar aims to:

- Develop a culture that views complaints as an opportunity to improve how it operates;
- Set in place a complaints handling and resolution procedure that is student focussed and helps it prevent complaints from recurring;
- Ensure that any complaints are resolved promptly, objectively and with sensitivity and in complete confidentiality;
- Ensure that the views of each complainant and respondent are respected and that any party to a complaint is not discriminated against nor victimised;
- Ensure that there is a consistent response to complaints.

It is the Seminar's policy to respond promptly and effectively to individual cases of dissatisfaction by utilising the procedure set out in this document.

### Definition of a complaint

A complaint can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of the services and activities of the Seminar including both academic and non-academic matters such as:

- The enrolment, induction/orientation or VET FEE-HELP application process;
- The quality of training or assessment provided;

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- The way someone has been treated;
- Access to personal records including information obtained by MRSS for the purposes of VET FEE-HELP Assistance and repayment of HELP loans;
- Breaches of personal information by Seminar.

Students are entitled to access these complaints handling procedures regardless of the location of campus at which the grievance has arisen, the student's place of residence or their mode of study.

**Before an issue becomes a formal complaint** the Seminar encourages that wherever possible, parties resolve concerns or difficulties directly with the person(s) concerned. The coordinators are available to assist the resolution of issues at this level.

## Complaints Procedure

Students receiving VET FEE HELP should refer to the '*Complaints Handling and Resolution for VET FEE HELP*' policy and procedure.

This procedure is designed to be utilised by anyone who wishes to lodge a formal complaint. Where a student lodges a formal complaint, their enrolment will be maintained throughout the process. There is no cost for a student to lodge a complaint or an appeal and no student's enrolment status will change until, if necessary, after the process has been fully completed. The complainant and/or respondent may be accompanied and assisted by a third party if desired at any stage of this procedure. If requested by the complainant and/or respondent, a full explanation in writing for decisions and actions taken as part of the procedures will be provided.

Complaints must be submitted in writing on a *Complaint and Appeal Form* to the Course Coordinator or other nominated impartial Senior Officer. The receipt of any complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 5 days and the complaints process will commence within 10 days of the receipt of the complaint. All complaints thus lodged will be recorded on the Seminar *Complaints, Grievance and Appeals Register*.

The Course Coordinator or their nominee ("the Seminar representative") will then, if necessary, seek to clarify the outcome that the complainant hopes to achieve. When such clarification occurs in a face-to-face interview with the complainant, they may ask another person to accompany them. The Seminar representative will then endeavour to resolve the complaint, providing a written report to the complainant within 20 working days on the steps that will be taken to address the complaint, clearly stating the reasons for the decision.

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Details of any actions arising and the outcome of the complaint will be recorded on the lodged *Complaint and Appeal Form*. A copy of this form will be provided to the complainant and the original kept on their file.

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they may Appeal the decision in writing to the Coordinator within 15 days of receiving the written report of the outcome.

## **Appeals**

This procedure is designed to ensure:

1. that appeals resulting from the complaint procedure are addressed efficiently and effectively;
2. that International Students have an avenue to appeal the Seminar's decision to report a breach of Visa conditions.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Appeals resulting from a complaint***

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome a formal complaint, they may appeal the decision in writing on a *Complain and Appeal Form* to the Coordinator within 15 days of receiving the written report of the outcome. All appeals thus lodged will be recorded on the Seminar *Complaints, Grievance and Appeals Register*.

The student will be notified in writing of the outcome with reasons for the decision, and the 'Complaints and Appeals Register' updated to record the decision.

The Coordinator will appoint a person who was not involved in the original decision to consult with the complainant and other relevant parties. Where possible such consultations should take the form of face-to-face interviews so that the complainant has an opportunity to formally present their case. The complainant may ask another person to accompany them to interviews.

Once the Coordinator receives a report of the Appeal consultation procedure, they will provide a written report to the complainant on the further steps taken to address the complaint, clearly stating the reasons for the decision.

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<sup>1</sup> This policy and procedure is also designed to capture data to assist the Seminar to continuously improve its operations as required by Essential Standards 1.1, 2.1 and 3.1. This policy is also designed to meet:

- HESA clause 19 of Schedule 1A
- ESOS Standard 8 Complaints and Appeals
- ESOS Standard 11 International Student Attendance

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If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome, they may make a written request to the MRSS that they wish the matter be dealt with externally.

## ***International Student appealing deferrals, suspension or cancellation of enrolment.***

Where a student wishes to appeal a decision relating to deferment, suspension, or cancellation of their enrolment they have 20 working days to lodge, in writing, a letter outlining the details of their appeal. All appeals thus lodged will be recorded on the Seminar *Complaints, Grievance and Appeals Register*.

A student may appeal on the basis of **extenuating** or **compassionate** or **compelling** circumstances as to why the decision should be reviewed and **must supply some documentation** supporting their appeal.

**Compassionate or compelling circumstances** are generally those beyond the control of the student and which have an impact upon the student's course progress or wellbeing. These could include, but are not limited to:

- **serious illness or injury**, where a medical certificate states that the student was unable to attend classes;
- **bereavement** of close family members such as parents or grandparents;
- **major political upheaval or natural disaster in the home country** requiring emergency travel and this has impacted on the student's studies;
- a **traumatic experience** which could include:
  - involvement in, or witnessing of a serious accident; and
  - witnessing or being the victim of a serious crime and this has impacted on the student (these cases should be supported by police or psychologists' reports)

Please note that the above are only some of examples of what may be considered compassionate or compelling circumstances. The Seminar uses professional judgment and assesses each case on its individual merits. When determining whether compassionate or compelling circumstances exist, we consider **documentary evidence** provided to support the claim. Copies of this evidence will be kept in the student's file.

The appeal must be lodged with the Coordinator and it will be entered into the 'Complaints and Appeals Register'.

The student may be provided the option of activating the external appeals process if they are not satisfied with the outcome. The student is required to notify the Seminar if they wish to proceed with the external appeals process.

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## ***External Appeals***

The MRSS will then advise ACPET in writing of the request within 5 working days. ACPET will arrange for a Round Table Discussion to be held between the Seminar and the complainant within 10 working days of the written notification from the Seminar. ACPET do not charge a fee for this service.

If the matter remains unresolved after the round table discussion then ACPET will appoint an independent mediator within 14 working days. ACPET plays no role in the actual mediation. It is then up to the mediator, the complainant and the Seminar to resolve the complaint.

The complainant and/or respondent may ask another person to accompany them to meetings with ACPET or the mediator.

The mediator will report to the *Melbourne Rudolf Steiner Seminar* the outcome of the mediation, including any recommendations arising, within 14 days of the completion of the review. Once the Seminar receives the report of the outcomes from the round table discussion or independent mediation, they will provide a written report to the complainant within 10 working days on the recommended actions to resolve the grievance.

The Seminar agrees to be bound by the independent mediator's recommendations and will ensure that any recommendations are referred to the *Continuous Improvement Committee* for action.

## ***Further Action:***

If the complaint still remains unresolved, the complainant may decide to refer the matter to an external agency such as the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority or contact the National Training Complaints Hotline on 1800 000 674.

The Coordinator will ensure that the Seminar will act immediately on any substantiated appeal. If the internal or any external complaint handling or appeal process results in a decision that supports the student, the registered provider must immediately implement any decision and/or corrective and preventative action that is required, and advise the student of the outcome.

## **Continuous Improvement**

Any areas for improvement which arise where a complaint is found to be substantiated are documented in a Continuous Improvement Report and handled according to the Continuous Improvement Policy and Procedure.

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## **Record Keeping and Confidentiality**

Records of all complaints handled under this procedure and their outcomes shall be maintained for a period of at least five years to allow all parties to the complaint appropriate access to these records, upon written request to the Seminar.

All records relating to complaints will be treated as confidential and will be covered by the Seminar's Privacy Policy.

## **Publication**

This *Communications Policy and Procedure* will be published on the Seminar's website and included in the student orientation process.

For the information of Staff this policy and procedure will be referred to in the Seminar Handbook and in the staff professional development and induction processes.

This *Complaints Handling and Resolution Policy and Procedure* was agreed to and ratified by the Melbourne Rudolf Steiner Seminar Ltd Board of Directors on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.