

The Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies would like to acknowledge both the Bunurong/Boon Wurrung, and Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Custodians of the Lands on which we are located in Melbourne. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge the Aboriginal language groups across all of Victoria, whose lands we provide funding for specific projects around Early Childhood Education. We acknowledge their history, their people, and their stories. As an Association we will work together for reconciliation, a process that starts with the acknowledgement of true Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures of Australia, and will always value the contribution to our community and culture, the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their families, communities and their stories.

Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

This policy provides guidance to the AGECS Council, general members, members of the public and contractors who wish to make a complaint.

2. Purpose

This policy is intended to ensure that AGECS handles complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all Council members and contractors receiving or managing complaints from members and the public made to or about AGECS, regarding services and Council members or contractors, or the complaint handling process.

4. Policy

AGECS expects all members at all levels to be committed to fair, effective and efficient complaint handling. The following table outlines the nature of the commitment expected from Council and members and the way that commitment should be implemented.

Who	Commitment	How
President	Promote a culture that values complaints and their effective resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report to the Council on our complaint handling. Provide adequate support and direction to key people responsible for handling complaints. Regularly review reports about complaint trends and issues arising from complaints.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage all Council members and contractors to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve promptly. • Encourage Council members and contractors to make recommendations for system improvements. • Support recommendations for service, Council and complaint handling improvements arising from the analysis of complaint data.
Office Bearers whose duties include complaint handling (may include President or member of the Executive)	Demonstrate exemplary complaint handling practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints. • Assist people to make a complaint, if needed. • Comply with our policy and associated procedures. • Provide regular feedback to the Program Manager and/or the Council on issues arising from complaints. • Provide suggestions to the Program Manager on ways to improve our complaints management system. • Implement changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis of complaint data as directed by management.
All Council members and contractors	Understand and comply with our complaint handling practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints. • Be aware of our complaint handling policies and procedures. • Assist people who wish to make complaints access our complaints process. • Be alert to complaints and assist staff handling complaints to resolve matters promptly.

5. Terms and Definitions

Complaint. An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about AGECS, such as services, a Council member/s, contractor/s or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

As well as complaints being made directly to AGECS some complaints (or at least negative comments) may be made on social media.

Complaint handling/management system. All policies, procedures, practices, Council members, contractors, hardware and software used by AGECS in the management of complaints.

Dispute. An unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of the organisation.

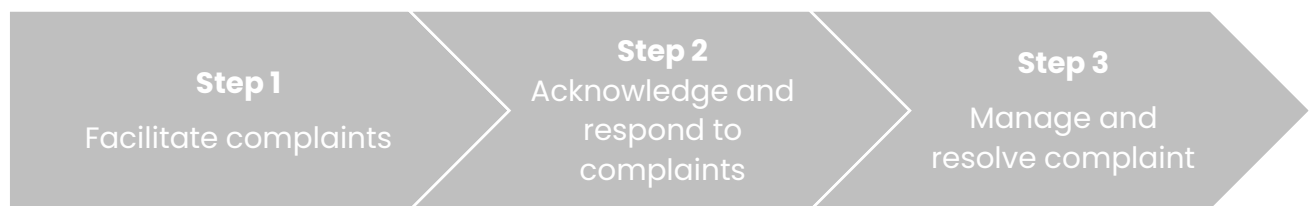
Feedback. Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about AGECS, about AGECS services or complaint handling system where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or required.

Grievance. A clear, formal written statement by an individual Council member about another Council member or a work-related problem. See Council Grievance and Dispute Resolution policy and procedure.

6. Guiding Principles

An effective complaint handling system must be modelled on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency and integration into organisational culture.

7. Procedure



7.1 Facilitates complaints

People focus

We are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about our services, systems and practices, procedures, products and complaint handling.

Any concerns raised in feedback or complaints will be dealt with within a reasonable time frame.

People making complaints will be:

- a) Provided with information about the complaint handling process and how to access it;
- b) Listened to, treated with respect and actively involved in the complaint process where possible and appropriate; and
- c) Provided with reasons for final decision/s and any options for redress or review.

No detriment to people making complaints

AGECS will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

Anonymous Complaints

AGECS accepts anonymous complaints if there is a compelling reason to do so and will carry out a confidential investigation of the issues raised where there is enough information provided.

Accessibility

AGECS will ensure that information about how and where complaints may be made to or about AGECS is well publicised on the AGECS website. AGECS will ensure that systems to manage complaints are easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance.

No charge

Complaints forwarded to and processed by AGECS are free.

7.2 Respond to complaints

Early resolution

Where possible, complaints will be resolved at first contact with AGECS. When appropriate, AGECS may offer an explanation or apology to the person making the complaint.

Responsiveness

AGECS will promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints.

AGECS will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

AGECS is committed to managing people's expectations, and will inform them as soon as possible, of the following:

- a) The complaints process;
- b) The expected time frames for our actions;
- c) The progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay;
- d) Their likely involvement in the process; and
- e) The possible or likely outcome of their complaint.

AGECS will advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to deal with any part of their complaint and provide advice about where such issues and/or complaints may be directed (if known and appropriate).

AGECS will also advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to meet our time frames for responding to their complaint and the reason for our delay.

Objectivity and fairness

AGECS will address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.

AGECS will ensure that the person handling a complaint is different from any Council member whose conduct or service is being complained about.

Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly. In particular, internal reviews of how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision maker.

Responding flexibly

The AGECS Executive committee members are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible. AGECS will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives.

AGECS will assess each complaint on its merits and involve people making complaints and/or their representative in the process as far as possible.

Confidentiality

AGECS will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate.

Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by us as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

7.3 Manage the parties to a complaint

Complaints involving multiple agencies

Where a complaint involves multiple organisations, AGECS will work with the other organisation/s where possible, to ensure that communication with the person making a complaint and/or their representative is clear and coordinated.

Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, communication and information sharing between the parties will also be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.

Where a complaint involves multiple areas within the organisation, responsibility for communicating with the person making the complaint and/or their representative will also be coordinated.

Where AGECS services are contracted out, the AGECS Council expects contracted service providers to have an accessible and comprehensive complaint management system. AGECS take complaints not only about the actions of ongoing employed personnel but also the actions of our service providers.

Empowerment of Council Members

All Council members managing complaints are empowered to implement the AGECS complaint management system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.

Council members are encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of our complaint management system.

Managing unreasonable conduct by people making complaints

AGECS is committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach Council members with feedback or complaints. At the same time the organisation's success depends on:

- a) AGECS's ability to do the required work and perform functions in the most effective and efficient way possible;
- b) the health, safety and security of the AGECS Council Members and contractors; and
- c) AGECS's ability to allocate our resources fairly across all the complaints received.

When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with the AGECS Council, their conduct can significantly affect the progress and efficiency of the organisation's work. As a result, AGECS will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects Council members and will support Council members and contractors to do the same in accordance with this policy.

Alternative avenues for dealing with complaints

People who make complaints to or about the organisation, will be informed by AGECS Council Executive about any internal or external review options available to them (including any relevant Ombudsman or oversight regulatory bodies).

The three levels of complaint handling

Level 1

The AGECS Council aims to resolve complaints at the first level, the frontline. Wherever possible the President, supported by the Vice President, will be adequately equipped to respond to complaints, including being given appropriate authority, training and supervision.

Level 2

Where this is not possible, we may decide to escalate the complaint to the Executive. This second level of complaint handling will provide for the following internal mechanisms:

- a) assessment and possible investigation of the complaint and decision/s already made; and/or
- b) facilitated resolution (where a person not connected with the complaint reviews the matter and attempts to find an outcome acceptable to the relevant parties).

Level 3

Where a person making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review of their complaint, they may seek an external review of the decision (by the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission for example).

8. Accountability and Learning

8.1 Analysis and evaluation of complaints

AGECS will ensure that complaints are recorded in a systematic way so that information can be easily retrieved for reporting and analysis by the Council.

The AGECS will run regular reports on:

- a) the number of complaints received;
- b) the outcome of complaints, including matters resolved at the frontline;
- c) issues arising from complaints;

- d) systemic issues identified; and
- e) the number of requests received for internal and/or external review of our complaint handling.

Regular analysis of these reports will be undertaken to monitor trends, measure the quality of customer service and make improvements.

Both reports and their analysis will be provided to the Council for review, at least annually.

8.2 Monitoring of the complaint management system

AGECS will continually monitor our complaint management system to:

- a) ensure its effectiveness in responding to and resolving complaints;
- b) identify and correct deficiencies in the operation of the system; and
- c) monitoring may include the use of audits, complaint satisfaction surveys and online listening tools and alerts.

8.3 Continuous improvement

AGECS is committed to improving the way the organisation operates, including the management of the effectiveness and efficiency of the complaint management system. To this end, AGECS will:

- a) support the making and appropriate resolution of complaints;
- b) implement best practices in complaint handling;
- c) recognise and reward exemplary complaint handling by the President and the Executive;
- d) regularly review the complaint management system and complaint data; and
- e) implement appropriate system changes arising out of our analysis of complaints data and continual monitoring of the system.

9. Related policies

This policy needs to be read in conjunction with other AGECS policies found on AGECS website:
<https://agecs.org.au/policies/>

It is the responsibility of the President to ensure that Council members are aware of this policy and procedure.

For questions about this policy, contact the President.

Version	2	Approved by Council on	03/05/2021, 29/07/2024
Responsible person	The President	Scheduled review date	3 years