

# PRO06 Complaints Handling Procedure

## Purpose of this Policy

This document outlines the process to follow as Staff and Directors when a complaint is received as per the Complaints Handling Policy.

## Scope

This procedure covers the process for formal complaints made to the school administration, as defined in the Complaints Handling Policy

## Definitions

- **The School** - Brisbane Independent School
- **The Management Committee** - The elected board of Brisbane Independent School Inc.
- **Complaint** - a statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable.
- **Complainant** - the person making the complaint
- **Investigator** - the designated person who will investigate the complaint (usually the Principal, however if there are any conflicts of interest, this may be another staff member or the Management Committee Chair).

## Feedback Process

If you would like to provide feedback on any aspect of this Procedure please email [policy@bis.qld.edu.au](mailto:policy@bis.qld.edu.au)

## Authorisation

Procedures are part of the School's Controlled Documents therefore any changes must be authorised. Procedures are owned by the School, therefore all authorisations are by the Principal.

## Version Control

Any changes to this document must be identified through Version History recording using this format:

*YYYYMMDD, Author, Addition/Removal/Format Edit ( use the appropriate word for the changes made)*

## Review Schedule

Next Review: March 2024

Change Register			
Document Version	Change Description	Authorised By	Date Implemented
2.0	Transfer to Google Docs Format	Lachlyn Bowie	22/04/22, 13:04
2.1	F04 converted from Google Form to Google Document (pdf for public).	Lachlyn Bowie & Angus Scown	2022/08/29

## Procedure

Inline with our Integral Philosophy and Non Violent Communication goals, complainants are encouraged, in the first instance, to seek resolution of their complaint directly with the staff member responsible for the decision, act or omission which forms the basis for their complaint (e.g. through discussion, meetings). If they believe it is appropriate to do so and they are able, willing and feel confident in approaching the person(s).

If the complainant is not comfortable with a direct approach they are encouraged to seek a support person to engage with them in the informal process. A support person could be the Principal or another staff member that is able to join a meeting or discussion as a support to the complainant, and to bear witness to the process.

If the issue can't be resolved a formal complaint can be made filling out and emailing the **F04 Complaint Form: Resolution Request** to [complaints@bis.qld.edu.au](mailto:complaints@bis.qld.edu.au).

The School is aware of the importance and value of complaints to grow and improve as an organisation. Inline with this we follow best practice guidelines of:

1. Acknowledge

2. Assess
3. Plan
4. Investigate
5. Respond
6. Follow-up
7. Consider

## 1 Acknowledge

A complaint must be acknowledged within 72 hours of being received. When lodged to [complaints@bis.qld.edu.au](mailto:complaints@bis.qld.edu.au) the Principal and Management Committee Chair are notified automatically. The Principal and Management Committee Chair will consider who is the most appropriate person to deal with the complaint. In most instances, this will be the Principal, however if there are any conflicts of interest, this may be another staff member or the Management Committee Chair (The Investigator). The acknowledgement sent from the **Investigator** must include:

- The Complaint Handling Process
- The name and contact details of the person handling the complaint
- When the next contact will take place
- An estimated time for the complaint to be resolved

The Investigator will lodge the **F05 Complaints Handling Tracking Form** to the complaints account: [complaints@bis.qld.edu.au](mailto:complaints@bis.qld.edu.au).

## 2 Assess

Early assessment of a complaint is essential to decide the direction and scope of the resolution. Complaints can either be simple to resolve or may involve a long process with external bodies involved.

The Investigator will assess the complaint against these guidelines:

- Does it involve more than one incident or issue?
- Does it involve a staff member, volunteer or parent?
- Does it trigger any legislative concerns under Workplace Health and Safety , Child Protection, Security or Privacy?
- Will it impact on the student learning?
- Will it impact on the safety of staff or volunteers?
- What does the complainant hope for from the resolution?
- Does this involve an ongoing issue with a process, policy or practice?

The Investigator may contact the complainant at this point to clarify points and find out what they hope will be achieved. At this point the Investigator will use **F05 Complaints Handling Tracking Form** to document the process.

### 3 Planning

Setting a clear plan to reach resolution of the complaint is essential to the procedure. It will allow the process to be followed through in the event of the Investigator not being available to do so and it focuses the attention on resolving the complaint. **F05 Complaints Handling Tracking Form** includes a copy of the plan. The plan covers:

- What exactly is being investigated
- The steps in the investigation
- An estimate of the time it will take
- What will remedy the complaint and reflect on the nature of the complainant's expectations
- Special considerations from the complainant or the situation

### 4 Investigation

The purpose of an investigation is twofold: to resolve the complaint by reaching a fair and independent view on the issues raised by a complainant; and to provide an appropriate remedy.

The three principles of fair investigation are outlined are

- **Impartiality.** Each complaint should be approached with an open mind, and the facts and contentions in support of a complaint should be weighed objectively.
- **Confidentiality.** A complaint should be investigated in private, and care should be taken when disclosing to others any identifying details of a complaint.
- **Transparency.** A complainant should be told about the steps in the complaint process and be given an opportunity to comment on adverse information or before a complaint is dismissed.

The following are among the requirements that are relevant to complaint investigation:

- A finding on a disputed factual matter must be based on evidence that is relevant and logically capable of supporting the finding—not on guesswork, preconceptions, suspicions or questionable assumptions.
- A written record should be kept of evidence that is provided orally during interviews.
- A complainant is not obliged to substantiate each fact or element in their complaint, although it is reasonable for the investigator to ask them to assist the investigation by providing documents they have or explaining things they know.
- The rules of evidence that apply in court proceedings do not apply to administrative investigation, and an investigator can use reliable information obtained from any source.
- To accord natural justice, a complainant should be given an opportunity to comment on contrary information or claims from another source before a decision is made to dismiss the complaint.

It is not always possible to resolve each disputed matter. The evidence available to the investigator might be scant, inconclusive or evenly balanced, and this should be explained to the complainant.

## 5 Response

When the investigation of a complaint is completed the complainant should be informed of the particulars of the investigation, including any findings or decision reached. Even when other aspects of the complaint are still being investigated the complainant will usually welcome an interim explanation of what has been finalised.

### **Low Risk Complaint**

Whether the explanation should be given orally or in writing, or in both ways, will depend on the circumstances. An oral explanation will usually be more efficient and will be expected if that is the method of communication preferred by the complainant or adopted in earlier dealings. A written record of the conversation must be made on relevant **F05 Complaints Handling Tracking Form** with any additions to what has been noted already, and lodged to the complaints account: [complaints@bis.qld.edu.au](mailto:complaints@bis.qld.edu.au).

### **High Risk Complaint**

If the complaint deals with a serious, complex or disputed matter. It might be appropriate to telephone the complainant to let them know that a more detailed written explanation will be forwarded to them. The explanation should be presented in a style the complainant can understand and should deal with each concern or grievance raised in the complaint. If some action is to be taken to redress a fault or a wrong suffered by the complainant, this should be described.

If a claim made by the complainant has not been accepted by the investigator, this should be noted and explained. An explanation should similarly be given if it has been decided not to investigate or to cease investigation of an issue raised by the complainant. The options available to the complainant, to seek internal review by the Management Committee of any adverse finding or to pursue the complaint in another place, should be outlined.

## 6 Follow-up

It is good practice to offer complainants the opportunity to seek review of how their complaint was handled and resolved. An invitation to follow up can usually be provided when the client is notified of the outcome of the investigation.

If a complainant is dissatisfied with an investigator's findings or decision, a review should be carried out by the Board, which has not been involved in the matter. In order to bring finality to the investigation, it is common to set a limit on the period in which the complainant must seek internal review and to require that the review be sought in writing. The complainant should also be asked to specify what exactly they would like reviewed and why they disagree with the investigator's view.

Mediation of an unresolved dispute between a complainant and an agency is another option. A mediator can help clarify matters, provide an impartial perspective, and propose solutions that both parties can agree on.

## 7 Consider - Systemic issues

Resolving a person's grievance is not the last step in effective complaint handling. The person's complaint might point to a systemic problem at the school. This possibility should always be considered when finalising a complaint.

For example, a complaint could expose a need to improve recordkeeping or a need for better training or support for staff who have given inaccurate or unhelpful advice. Delay in resolving a person's complaint might suggest a need for greater efficiency.

A review of procedures and policies can be another beneficial outcome. Responsibility for analysing complaint trend sits with the Principal and are reported to and analysed by the Board in an annual report.

## Documents that inform this Policy

**POL06 Complaints Handling Policy**

**F04 Complaint Form: Resolution Request**

**F05 Complaints Handling Tracking Form**

**F04 Complaints Register**