

Policy

Subject: Complaints Handling
Approval Date: March 2000, July 2003, November 2008, July 2011, November 2013, February 2016, March 2019, December 2021
Review Date: December 2024
Review By: Board of Directors
Number: 13/1999

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to give effect to the commitment of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (hereafter, the “**College**”) to fairly and appropriately address complaints and thereby provide quality service to its membership, stakeholders, other organisations and the general public. The College will endeavour to demonstrate this commitment by:
 - (a) maintaining continuous improvement of College services as a priority activity;
 - (b) reminding management and staff about their responsibility to improve service quality continuously; and
 - (c) regularly reviewing services to ensure the highest standards of quality are achieved.
- 1.2. This Policy describes guidelines by which the College endeavours to address complaints about the College, including but not limited to, complaints arising from activities undertaken in connection with the College.
- 1.3. This Policy can be updated or amended from time to time by the College at its absolute discretion.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy applies to the management of complaints from their inception to the point at which the complaint is either resolved by the College or referred for resolution externally. Such complaints may be initiated by:
 - (a) Fellows, Affiliates, Members, Associates, and Associates of Faculties, or applicants for the same in respect of activities undertaken in connection with the College;
 - (b) registered Trainees of the College and its Faculties, or applicants for the same in respect of activities involving a Supervisor or other person appointed by the College or otherwise in connection with the College;

- (c) other individuals who are not employees of the College but who are involved in the activities of the College;
- (d) external organisations; and
- (e) the general public in respect of activities undertaken in connection with the College.

2.2. The Policy is intended to cover complaints:

- (a) about the College as a body corporate;
- (b) that are a verbal or written expression of dissatisfaction with the services, products or activities of, or in connection with, the College;
- (c) arising from the College's internal or external relationships; or
- (d) arising in relation to activities by Fellows, Affiliates, Members, Associates, and Associates of Faculties in connection with the College or in association with their public profile and/or status as Fellows, Affiliates, Members, Associates, or Associates of Faculties;

(hereafter, "Complaint").

This Policy excludes from its scope complaints in relation to individual Fellows, Affiliates, Members, Associates, and Associates of Faculties, from a professional practice point of view.

3. References

The College has established this Policy to align with the relevant Australian Standards regarding complaints handling in organisations.

4. Policy

- 4.1 The College recognises that Complaints may arise in the course of the College business and welcomes such Complaints in so far as they provide an opportunity for the College to improve its services and processes.
- 4.2 This Policy aims to assist the College in determining:
 - (a) which process is most appropriate to address a Complaint; and
 - (b) whether any inappropriate conduct has occurred; andif so, taking appropriate action as necessary, including (but not limited to) counselling and / or disciplinary measures.
- 4.3 The College will use its best endeavours to ensure that all individuals within the scope of this Policy are informed of, and/or have access to, this Policy.
- 4.4 This Policy will be included in the Information Booklet for Trainees, and the Guide for Supervisors.

- 4.5 The College is committed to ensuring that all Complaints are dealt with as promptly as possible and in an appropriately confidential manner (in accordance with paragraphs 4.6 and 4.7).

The possibility of an individual reporting a Complaint in good faith being disadvantaged or victimised will not be tolerated.

- 4.6 Confidentiality is an important part of this Policy. Everyone involved in a Complaint under this Policy, such as an individual reporting a Complaint or a person involved in an investigation process, is responsible for observing the high level of confidentiality that is required to ensure the integrity of any process undertaken in addressing a Complaint made under this Policy.
- 4.7 The College will endeavour to keep the Complaint and the details of the investigation process as confidential as is reasonably possible, having regard to the rights of all involved in the Complaint process. That said, there may be circumstances in which full confidentiality cannot be maintained if the Complaint is to be fully investigated and/or resolved. Details of the investigation and the names of the individuals making and responding to the Complaint will be disclosed only on a "need to know" basis.
- 4.8 The College will endeavour to respond to a Complaint by acknowledging the Complaint within 72 hours, and by fully informing the individual reporting the Complaint of the process which will be followed. Complaints are likely to be investigated within 60 days.
- 4.9 The College expects that the behaviour of any individual undertaking activities in connection with the College will not fall below the standards set out in this Policy and other applicable policies and procedures.
- 4.10 Potential individuals reporting a Complaint should be aware of their responsibilities of lodging a Complaint and the seriousness of lodging a vexatious Complaint.
- 4.11 If a Trainee believes the lodging of a Complaint has disadvantaged them educationally, the Trainee may report the Complaint under this Policy, or have recourse to the College's Anti-Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy.
- 4.12 Where appropriate, any reports made in respect of Complaints and their outcome may be kept in a complaints register and remain subject to the confidentiality principles set out above. Details of Complaints relating to a Fellow, Affiliate, Associate, Trainee, Supervisor, or Fellow or Associate Fellow of a Faculty of the College may be kept in that individual's file with a reference only in the Complaints register.
- 4.13 The College will endeavour to utilise Complaints data in order to identify and rectify recurring or systemic problems.
- 4.14 The College will also use its best endeavours to maintain an up to date College Incident Monitoring System.

5. Procedure

The following procedure is a guide only, as every Complaint may require different treatment. The actual process that the College follows may vary depending upon the nature of the Complaint and the surrounding circumstances.

- 5.1. Where possible and appropriate, before any formal investigation or response is considered, the person receiving the Complaint should try to resolve the Complaint informally using the method most appropriate to the circumstances. This may include, but is not limited to, discussing the Complaint with relevant parties or approaching the individual against whom the Complaint is made.
- 5.2. Complaints from Trainees should be sent to:
 - 1) State or Regional Councillor;
 - 2) RCPA Education Advisor;
 - 3) Registrar of Board of Education and Assessment;
 - 4) RCPA CEO (or RCPA DCEO); or
 - 5) College Ombudsman.
- 5.3. In any situation that may fall within the Anti-Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy, the CEO/Deputy CEO should be notified.
- 5.4. In circumstances where the informal resolution process set out above at paragraph 5.1 does not resolve the Complaint or is inappropriate in the circumstances, the unresolved Complaint will likely be referred to the Chief Executive Officer, other Officers of the College and/or Board of Directors for formal investigation.
- 5.5. The College will, where it considers it to be appropriate, investigate the Complaint either internally or externally. Relevant parties may be asked to participate as part of the formal investigation process.
- 5.6. The complaint will be investigated using the principles of natural justice and in accordance with the confidentiality principles referred to above at paragraphs 4.5 to 4.7).
- 5.1 A proven Complaint may result in further action including any one or more of the following possible outcomes:
 - (a) Mediation - this is a process where parties are brought together to try and reach agreement as to how the complaint should be resolved. Mediation provides the opportunity for a good working relationship to be re-established between the parties;
 - (b) an apology from the College and/or an individual;
 - (c) counselling;
 - (d) action to redress the behaviour that is the subject of the Complaint;
 - (e) training;
 - (f) if the proven Complaint concerns the conduct of a Fellow, action may be taken in accordance with Rule 28, Disciplining Fellows of the College's Constitution;
 - (g) if the proven Complaint concerns the conduct of an Affiliate, action may be taken in accordance with the College's Affiliate Membership Regulation;

- (h) if the proven Complaint concerns the conduct of an Associate, action may be taken in accordance with the College's Associate Membership Regulation; and/or
- (i) if the proven Complaint concerns an employee of the College, action will likely be in accordance with current industrial relations practice and be subject to the terms and conditions of any contract of employment or award and relevant State and Commonwealth or New Zealand legislation.