



Irish Support Agency
Complaints Policy
14 April 2021

Complaints Policy

Introduction

The Irish Support Agency (ISA) recognises the importance and value of listening and responding to concerns and complaints. We are committed to achieving the highest standard we can in every area of our work and to continuous improvement. This applies especially to delivery of services, seeking donations and accountability to stakeholders generally. Receiving concerns and complaints is one of the most important ways of learning what we need to do to improve our service.

Purpose

The 'right to be heard' and the 'right to redress' are basic consumer rights, as reflected in the consumer guarantee in the Australian Consumer Law and enshrined in the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection. This Policy includes a sound process where a client or stakeholder is aware of the process, can access the process freely, can make queries or report and lodge a complaint, and receive a response.

Objective

The ISA aims to address any complaints from the public about ISA's activities with the most positive outcome. The investigation of these complaints will be managed with care and objectivity.

Definitions

Complaint means an expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation, related to its products or services, or the complaint handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

complainant means a person, organisation or its representative, making a complaint.

Inquiry means a request for information or an explanation. Feedback means opinions, comments, suggestions and expressions of interest in the products or the complaint handling process.

Stakeholder or interested party means a person or group having an interest in the performance or success of the organisation.

Scope

Who can complain?

This Policy is intended to apply to any complaint, regardless of who makes it. We will accept complaints relating to our paid staff, our volunteers, our partners, our contracted service providers or anyone else acting on our behalf. A complaint may be made by a person to whom we deliver services or who is affected by our services, a partner, an organisation with which we work, our staff, volunteers, donors or a member of the public. Anonymous complaints can be made, but obviously our ability to investigate them may be limited because of this.

Educating our organisation on our complaint policy and training relevant personnel

Our Complaints Policy has been distributed to all our paid staff, volunteers, committee, our contracted service providers and all others acting on our behalf. We require all those who may be involved in any way with a complaint to formally signify their commitment to this policy. To familiarise them with this policy we run induction programs for our committee members and all relevant personnel. Personnel directly involved in complaint handling are fully trained in all aspects of this policy and its implementation.

Publicising our Policy

We make clear the value we place on receiving concerns and complaints in all relevant communications. An electronic or hard copy of this policy is available upon request. Where literacy is a constraint, we will verbally invite expressions of concern and complaint on a regular basis. We will take complaints verbally in person, over the phone and by any written means. We will do our very best to assist a complainant to put their complaint in writing or to write it down ourselves as faithfully as we can. All assistance will be provided to have concerns documented.

Policy

Where and How Complaints may be made

We are able to receive complaints verbally in person or

- **by telephone:** call ISA Coordinator in Australia on 02 9300 8019 / From Ireland to Australia on 0061 2 9300 8019.
- **by post:** ISA Coordinator PO Box K774, Haymarket, NSW 1240
- **by email:** admin@irishsupportagency.org.au

Where complaints are made verbally, we will ensure the recording of the complaint contains all the information the complainant wishes to provide. Complaints may be made by a friend or advocate of the complainant on their behalf. We recognise that in some circumstances complainants may wish to remain anonymous. Because such complaints can alert us to problems that need fixing, we will accept them, though clearly it may not be possible to provide a remedy to an individual.

2. How we will handle complaints

When we take a verbal complaint

Identify ourselves, listen, record details, and determine what the client wants;

- Confirm that we have understood and received the details;
- Show empathy for the complainant but not attempt to take sides, lay blame, or become defensive;

For all complaints

- seek from the complainant the outcome/s they are expecting;
- Make an initial assessment of the severity of the complaint and the urgency of action
- Clearly explain to the complainant the course of action that will follow:
 - if the complaint is out of our jurisdiction;
 - if we may exercise a discretion not to investigate;
 - if preliminary enquiries need to be made, or further consideration needs to be given;

Or, if the complaint is to be investigated.

- We will not create false expectations but assure the complainant that the complaint will receive full attention; Give an estimated timeframe or if that is not possible, a date by which we will contact them again;
- Check whether the complainant is satisfied with the proposed action and, if not, advise them of alternatives.
- Ensure that the complaint is appropriately acknowledged;
- Follow up where necessary and monitor whether the complainant is satisfied.
- We will register all complaints.

Where appropriate we will ensure that personnel have all necessary training to encourage and handle inquiries, expressions of concern and making of complaints so as to take account of cultural and gender sensitivities and to ensure that cases involving children are appropriately handled.

We will ensure that a complainant is not required to express their complaint to a person implicated in their complaint. We will also ensure that a person implicated in a complaint is not involved in any way with the handling of that complaint.

3. Initial assessment of complaint

We will first assess whether there is more than one issue raised in the complaint and whether each needs to be separately addressed. To determine how a complaint should be managed, we will assess it in terms of the following criteria:

- a) severity;
- b) health (including mental health) and safety implications;
- c) financial implications for the complainant or others
- d) complexity;
- e) impact on the individual, public and organisation;
- d) potential to escalate;
- f) systemic implications
- g) the need for, and possibility of immediate action.

If we assess the complaint as significant in terms of one or more of these criteria, we will classify the complaint accordingly.

4. Inquiries, minor complaints and jurisdiction

We will endeavour to deal immediately with inquiries and minor complaints which are made verbally by telephone or in person that is during the initial phone call or meeting. However, as far as possible, we will ensure that the inquirer or complainant is

completely satisfied with the information and / or resolution provided.

On receipt of a complaint we will also attempt to determine expeditiously whether investigation is required or not depending on jurisdictional questions and whether the complaint is ill conceived.

If the complainant disputes an assessment that a complaint should not be investigated, the member of staff handling the complaint will refer it to a more senior colleague for review.

5. How we will investigate complaints

The ISA will make every reasonable effort to investigate all the relevant circumstances and information surrounding a complaint. The level of investigation will be commensurate with the seriousness and frequency of the complaint.

6. Our timeframes

We will acknowledge written complaints within 5 days. We will acknowledge verbal complaints immediately. We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and within 30 days unless there are exceptional circumstances. If a complaint is not resolved within 30 days, we will inform the complainant of progress and keep them informed of progress every two weeks thereafter.

7. How we will respond to and close a complaint

Our President or a Senior Board Member delegated by him/her will normally make the decision on a complaint that has required investigation (that is not a minor complaint). Decisions on serious complaints may be referred to our Committee.

We will communicate our decision on a complaint as soon as is practical. Our communication will be in writing, by email and/or post.

We will encourage the complainant to respond and advise whether or not they are satisfied with our decision. In our decision we will advise that if a complainant is not satisfied, we will be prepared to consider any additional information they may provide to review our decision.

8. How we will learn from complaints

We will ensure that all relevant personnel are informed of the outcomes of complaints and the implications for our services, procedures and processes. We will take all required remedial action. We will be prepared to change the way in which we operate and improve or undertake further training of staff.

Where needed we will counsel or discipline staff or volunteers.

9. Confidentiality

We will not reveal a complainant's name or personal details to anyone in or outside our organisation other than staff involved in handling the complaint without obtaining the complainant's permission.

10. Complaint data

We will register all inquiries and complaints. We will ensure that the following information is contained in written complaints and if not, and in the case of verbal complaints, record this information ourselves:

- date of receipt
- a description of the complaint and relevant supporting data;
- the requested outcome;
- the service(s) and/or good(s) and/or practice or procedure involved in the complaint;
- the due date for a response;
- immediate action taken (if any) to resolve the complaint

11. Reporting about complaints

We will immediately escalate complex and/or major complaints to our President or his/her delegate. All complaints will be reported at our monthly meetings. Minor complaints will be reported in summary form. Major complaints will be reported in detail.

12. Continuous Improvement

On a continuing basis we will monitor the effectiveness of our complaint handling and make improvements as appropriate. We will:

- maintain data collection on complaints for the purpose of identifying trends and for the purpose of enhancing information management and service provided;
- keep abreast of best practices regarding complaint handling;
- foster a client - focused approach;

Workplace Acknowledgement

I acknowledge:

- *receipt of the ISA Policy*
- *that I will comply with the Policy and*
- *that there may be disciplinary consequences if I fail to comply, which may result in the termination of my employment.*

Your name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____