



## 1. Purpose

This Complaints Policy outlines Vital Anaesthesia Simulation Training (VAST)'s commitment to seeking and responding to external feedback and complaints about any aspect of VAST's work in Australia and overseas. It 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 performance.

We make clear the value we place on receiving concerns and complaints in all relevant communications. We advise how a copy of this policy may be obtained and we provide clear information on how complaints may be made.

## 2. Objective

To establish a robust, open and transparent mechanism for handling complaints regarding VAST and its Representatives

## 3. Guiding principles

We have adopted the following principles for complaint policy and procedures:

### 3.1 Visibility

We will clearly publicise information about how and where to complain. This policy is on [VAST's website](#) under the policy portfolio.

### 3.2 Accessibility

We will ensure that our complaint handling process is as accessible as possible to all complainants.

### 3.3 Responsiveness

We will respond to complaints as rapidly as possible; we will endeavour wherever possible to acknowledge all complaints within 5 working days of receipt. VAST will aim to resolve complaints within one month of receipt. If a complaint is unable to be resolved within one month, the complainant will be provided with monthly updates until the complaint is resolved.

### 3.4 Objectivity

We will address all complaints in an equitable, fair and unbiased manner using evidence submitted by both the complainant and our representatives through the complaint handling process.

### 3.5 Charges

Access to the complaint handling process is free of charge to complainants.

### 3.6 Confidentiality

We will observe strict confidentiality in complaint handling. Details will be kept completely confidential unless natural justice or the law requires disclosure. Disclosure of details in these circumstances is at the discretion of the VAST person handling the complaint.

### 3.7 Stakeholder focused approach

The interests of our stakeholders are foremost in our approach to complaint handling.

### 3.8 Accountability

We will ensure that accountability for and reporting on the actions and decisions with respect to complaint handling are clearly established.

### 3.9 Continual improvement

Continual improvement of the complaint handling process is one of our permanent objectives.

### 3.10 Sensitivity

All complaints will be taken seriously and be dealt with sensitivity to cultural expectations.

## 4. Scope

This policy deals solely with external grievances. While the policy needs to be understood and applied by all Representatives, this policy only covers complaints made by those external to VAST, including:

- a person with whom VAST works to deliver its programs including local partners, organisations and national governments
- participants in any of VAST's activities
- other organisations
- members of the public
- supporters, donors, trusts and foundations.

Internal issues and grievances made by staff and volunteers are to be dealt with in discussion with VAST board members. Internal complaints regarding serious misconduct or wrongdoing should be made in accordance with VAST's Whistleblower Policy.

## 5. Dictionary

Term	Meaning
<b>Representative</b>	All VAST office bearers, staff and volunteers associated with Vital Anaesthesia Simulation Training (VAST).
<b>Complaint</b>	An expression of dissatisfaction made to VAST, related to its products or services, or the complaint handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.
<b>Complainant</b>	A person or organisation making a complaint.
<b>Inquiry</b>	A request for information or an explanation.

<b>Feedback</b>	Opinion, comments, suggestions and expressions of interest in the products or the complaint handling process.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	Person or group having an interest in the performance or success of VAST.

## 6. Policy

### 6.1 Publicising our policy

We value receiving genuine concerns and valid complaints. We use the word “complaint” or its equivalent in relevant languages other than English where appropriate. Our website opening page has a prominent tab with the word complaint linking to this policy and information on how to make a complaint. Where literacy is a constraint, we will invite verbal expressions of concern and complaint on a regular basis. We will take care to give this invitation in a way that is culturally appropriate, recognising that in some cultures people require greater encouragement to make a complaint. We will take special care to facilitate complaints from vulnerable populations including children and marginalised groups. If required we will make use of pictorial means of communication.

We ensure that making a complaint to us is as easy as possible. We will take complaints via various means: verbal complaints in person, over email 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.

Our communication regarding the procedures for how complaints are handled will include:

- where or to whom complaints can be made
- the information to be provided by the complainant
- our process for handling complaints
- time periods for handling complaints
- the complainant’s options for remedy, including external means
- how the complainant can obtain feedback on the status of the complaint

Complaints can be submitted via the following methods:

- Email: [vastcourse@gmail.com](mailto:vastcourse@gmail.com)
- Filling out the online [contact us](#) form on our website
- Letter: PO Box 8691, Perth BC, Western Australia, 6849
- In person to a VAST Representative or any person associated with VAST partner organisation or government official who will be responsible to refer the complaint to the VAST Managing Director within 2 working days of receiving it

Where complaints are made orally, we will ensure our write up 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 his or her behalf.

Where appropriate:

- we may establish complaint committees involving representatives from partner organisations and members of communities we are serving

### COMPLAINTS POLICY

Approved by the Board: October 2020

Scheduled for review: October 2023

Page 3 of 7

- we may utilise complaint/suggestion boxes. 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.

## 6.2 How complaints are handled

When we take an oral complaint we will:

- identify ourselves, listen, record details, and determine what the complainant wants addressed
- confirm that we have understood and received the details
- show empathy for the complainant, without attempting to take sides, lay blame or become defensive

For all complaints we will:

- seek from the complainant the desired outcome/s he or she is 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, such as: whether we may exercise a discretion not to investigate (particularly in the case of complaints outside of our jurisdiction), if preliminary enquiries need to be made, whether further consideration needs to be given and if the complaint is to be investigated.
- not create false expectations, but assure the complainant that valid complaints will receive full attention
- give an estimated timeframe or, if that is not possible, a date by which we will contact him or her again
- check whether the complainant is satisfied with the proposed action and, if not, advise him or her of alternatives
- ensure that the complaint is appropriately acknowledged
- follow up where necessary, and monitor whether the complainant is satisfied
- register them (see 6.10)

Where appropriate, we will ensure that personnel working in communities we serve have had all the necessary training to encourage and handle inquiries, expressions of concern and the making of complaints, accounting for cultural and gender sensitivities and to ensuring that cases involving children are appropriately handled.

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

## 6.3 Initial assessment of complaint

We will first assess whether there is more than one issue raised in the complaint and if so whether each issue 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

### COMPLAINTS POLICY

Approved by the Board: October 2020

Scheduled for review: October 2023

Page 4 of 7

- f) potential to escalate
- g) systemic implications
- h) 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.

#### 6.4 Inquiries, minor complaints, proper complaints and jurisdiction

We will endeavour to deal as soon as possible with inquiries and minor complaints which are made orally or in person. However, as far as practical, we will endeavour to ensure that the inquirer or complainant is 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. If such a dispute is unresolvable, we will refer the complaint to an external body for further assessment.

#### 6.5 How complaints are investigated

We 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 with the seriousness and frequency of the complaint.

#### 6.6 Timeframes

We will acknowledge written complaints within 5 business days. We will acknowledge oral complaints immediately. We will 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 monthly.

#### 6.7 Responding to and closing a complaint

Our Managing Director, board member or his or her delegated representative 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 Board.

We will communicate our decision on a complaint as soon as is practical. Our communication will be in writing in the appropriate language by email and/or post. However, where appropriate such as in the case of a complaint being made by a local community member (in the field) we will also communicate our decision orally and again in the appropriate language.

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 and to review our decision.

## COMPLAINTS POLICY

Approved by the Board: October 2020

Scheduled for review: October 2023

Page 5 of 7

## 6.8 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, goods, procedures and processes.

We will take all required remedial action. We will be receptive to changing the way in which we operate and improving or undertaking further training of staff. Where needed we will counsel or discipline staff or volunteers.

Where appropriate we will consult and take advice from relevant regulatory/enforcement authorities.

## 6.9 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 first obtaining the complainant's permission.

## 6.10 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 oral complaints, record this information ourselves:

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

## 6.11 Reporting about complaints

We will immediately refer complex and/or major complaints to our Managing Director or his/her delegate.

All complaints will be reported at our governing board meetings as a standing agenda item. Minor complaints will be reported in summary form. Major complaints will be reported in detail. An analysis will be included in the complaint's report provided with the complaint's data. Our Annual Report will provide de-identified information on complaints.

## 6.12 Continuous improvement in complaint handling

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

## 7. Procedure

Our Complaints Policy is made available to all our paid staff, our volunteers, our partners, our Representatives and 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 signify their commitment to this policy.

We conduct an onboarding process to familiarise board members and all relevant personnel with this policy. Personnel directly involved in complaint handling will be

### COMPLAINTS POLICY

Approved by the Board: October 2020

Scheduled for review: October 2023

Page 6 of 7

trained in all aspects of this policy and its implementation. We will endeavour to train our representatives to encourage, receive and handle complaints taking account of language issues and cultural sensitivities.

#### 8. Related and supporting documents

- VAST Code of Conduct
- VAST Whistleblower Policy

#### 9. Document revisions

Version	Date approved	Summary of hanges
v1.0	24 October 2020	