Complaints and appeals

Policy and Procedure | All training and assessment pathways

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Owner and approver	Compliance Manager or delegate	Director or CEO
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1 Purpose and scope

STARK INSTITUTE will provide an accessible and fair process for feedback, complaints and review of adverse decisions. This policy applies to prospective, current and former students, staff, employers and other people affected by STARK services. It covers structured qualifications, short courses, RPL, credit transfer, gap training, combined pathways and all delivery modes.

A complaint is a concern about services, conduct, facilities, safety or processes. An appeal is a request to review a decision, including admission, assessment, recognition, fees, refunds, withdrawal, cancellation or deferment. Concerns about another student, workplace host, representative or services delivered on STARK's behalf may also be raised.

2 Fairness and access

Staff will listen without prejudging the matter, explain the process and give affected parties a reasonable opportunity to respond to relevant information. A person involved in the original matter will not investigate or determine their own case. Staff will protect people from retaliation or disadvantage for raising a concern or participating in a review.

The internal process and independent review arranged by STARK will be free. Administration will assist with recording concerns, accessible communication, language assistance and reasonable adjustments. A support person or authorised representative may attend. Anonymous complaints will be considered where enough information is available to act.

Administration will make this policy publicly accessible and provide it before enrolment and at induction. Informal discussion is optional. A specific form is not required, and an unpaid fee will not prevent a complaint or appeal. Legal and consumer rights and access to external agencies will remain available.

3 Contact and responsible officer

Administration and Student Support will receive complaints and appeals.
Email: info@stark.edu.au | Phone: 0469 338 334
A person may also speak with any STARK staff member in person.

4 Common receipt and complaints procedure

4.1 Receive and record

A person may contact the staff member involved if comfortable, or lodge directly with Administration by telephone, email, in person or through the Complaints and Appeals Form. Staff will record what happened, relevant dates and people, supporting information and the outcome sought. For verbal complaints, Administration will confirm the record with the person where possible.

Staff and any authorised third party receiving a concern about STARK services will refer it promptly to Administration. Administration will open a case in the Complaints and Appeals Register, record the first receipt date and retain the original communication in a restricted case file. Administration will classify the issue as academic, non academic or both. Feedback indicating a complaint will be referred for review rather than left as an informal comment. Classification will not delay action or restrict appeal rights.

4.2 Acknowledge and allocate

Administration will acknowledge receipt, provide this policy and explain the case contact, next steps and expected dates. Compliance or the CEO will appoint an impartial case officer and record any conflict check. A complaint involving the CEO will be referred directly to a suitable external independent reviewer. The person may raise a reasonable concern about the proposed reviewer's independence.

4.3 Investigate fairly

The case officer will apply the academic procedure in section 5 or the non academic procedure in section 6, clarify the issues, review relevant records and obtain responses from affected parties. The officer will consider the accepted agreement, policy version and actual events, and keep a record of the information considered. Necessary information will be shared for a fair response while protecting unrelated private information.

Urgent safety, harassment or privacy concerns will receive immediate risk assessment and protective action where needed. Interim protection will be recorded separately from findings. If a complainant withdraws the complaint, Compliance will consider whether a safety or systemic issue still requires action.

4.4 Communicate the outcome

The case officer will provide a written outcome with findings, reasons, relevant information considered, actions and review options. Other affected parties will be informed as appropriate to their involvement. Administration will record action owners and due dates and check that authorised corrections are completed.

4.5 Service timeframes

Action	STARK timeframe
Acknowledge a complaint or appeal	Within 5 working days of first receipt
Start investigation or internal review	Within 10 working days of first receipt
Provide written internal outcome	Normally within 30 calendar days of first receipt
Notify and manage a delay	Before the target date, give reasons and a revised date in writing; update at least every 10 working days

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Working days are Monday to Friday excluding applicable public holidays. These are STARK service commitments, not prescribed SRTO deadlines. Staff will act sooner where urgency requires or an earlier legal or contractual deadline applies. Requests for information will not automatically restart the clock.

5 Academic complaints and assessment decisions

5.1 Matters covered and allocation

Academic matters concern training, learning support, assessment and recognition. They include course suitability and LLN review decisions, training delivery or resources, assessment instructions or conditions, feedback, assessment judgement or competency decisions, reassessment access or attempts, reasonable adjustment in assessment, RPL and credit transfer outcomes, and accuracy of recorded results.

Administration will record the matter under section 4 and refer it to the Training Manager or an impartial academic reviewer appointed by Compliance. A challenge to an assessment judgement will be treated as an academic appeal immediately under section 7; the student will not have to complete a separate complaint first. The original assessor may explain the decision but will not determine the appeal against it.

5.2 Academic review

The reviewer will use the relevant training and assessment plan, assessment tool and requirements, submitted work, assessor records, feedback, recognition record and support plan. The reviewer will consider whether instructions were clear, the judgement was supported, required procedures were followed, support or adjustment was considered, and the student received an appropriate reassessment opportunity.

5.3 Reassessment and correction

If further assessment is needed, an authorised assessor will document what is required, the support or adjustment, arrangements, assessor and expected date. Review or reassessment required to correct a STARK error will be free. An appeal or review will not itself count as an additional assessment attempt. An ordinary new reassessment unrelated to a STARK error will follow the accepted assessment and fee policies; any charge will be explained before scheduling.

Any changed competency decision will be made by an appropriately credentialled and vocationally competent assessor. Administration will retain the original decision and audit trail, record authorised corrections in the student management system, and arrange any required certification correction. The written outcome will explain the reasons, action and independent review rights. Sections 4.5, 7 and 10 govern timeframes and escalation.

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6 Non academic complaints and decisions

6.1 Matters covered and allocation

Non academic matters concern administration, services, conduct or business arrangements. They include enrolment processing, offers and information, fees, payments, refunds, student initiated or STARK initiated cancellation, withdrawal, deferment, complaints about staff or student behaviour, bullying, discrimination, harassment, safety, critical incidents, privacy, facilities and services provided on STARK's behalf. Staff may also raise non academic concerns through this procedure; any related employment matter will be coordinated with the applicable staff procedure.

Administration will record the matter under section 4 and refer it to an impartial manager or case officer appointed by Compliance. Accounts will supply financial records for fee matters; the relevant authorised officer will supply enrolment, conduct, safety or privacy records. A challenge to an adverse decision will also have access to the appeal procedure in section 7.

6.2 Review and outcome

The case officer will examine communications, the accepted agreement, applicable policy, notices and service records and obtain responses from relevant parties. Findings will address the concern and identify any correction, refund recommendation, changed administrative decision, support or protective action. The written outcome will give reasons and review rights. Financial recommendations will follow section 9.2 and the required refund approvals.

Where a concern includes both academic and non academic issues, Administration will coordinate one case with separate findings and suitably qualified reviewers for each issue. A fee or conduct finding will not substitute for an assessor's competency judgement. The shared timeframes in section 4.5 and independent review in section 10 apply to both categories.

6.3 Complaints involving staff

A complaint about a staff member will be referred to an impartial manager through Compliance. Where the complaint concerns the receiving officer or manager, Administration will refer it to the CEO or an independent delegate; a complaint about the CEO will follow the independent allocation arrangements in section 4. Staff named in a complaint will have a fair opportunity to respond. The complainant will receive the findings and relevant service or protective action, while confidential employment or disciplinary information will be restricted to authorised persons. Any disciplinary action will follow the applicable staff procedure and procedural fairness.

6.4 Critical incidents and urgent safety concerns

A critical incident is an event causing, or posing a serious threat of, injury, death, violence, severe distress or disruption to safety. Staff receiving a report will immediately notify the responsible manager, arrange emergency assistance where required and take appropriate protective action. Staff will not wait for a complaint form or an investigation before addressing immediate danger.

The responsible manager will activate the applicable critical incident and emergency procedures, record the event in the incident report or register, arrange support, preserve relevant information and assess any required external notification. Administration will cross reference any complaint in the complaints register. Incident response and complaint review may proceed together; interim safety measures will not determine fault or remove appeal rights. Compliance will monitor follow up actions and communicate relevant outcomes, subject to privacy and lawful restrictions.

7 Appeals procedure

7.1 Lodge and acknowledge

A student or applicant may appeal a decision or complaint outcome through any contact method in section 3. Administration will assist the person to identify the decision, reasons for disagreement and relevant information. The usual lodgement period is 20 working days after receiving the decision. A later appeal will be considered where circumstances reasonably prevented an earlier request; reasons for accepting or declining it will be recorded.

Administration will register and acknowledge the appeal under section 4.5. Compliance will appoint a suitably qualified reviewer who was not involved in the original decision and has no conflict. If an impartial internal reviewer is unavailable, STARK will arrange an external reviewer at its cost.

7.2 Review the decision

The reviewer will examine the original decision, relevant information, accepted terms, applicable procedure and whether the person had a fair opportunity to participate. The person may explain their case and respond to relevant new information. The review will address the actual grounds raised and any necessary correction rather than simply endorse the original decision.

For assessment, RPL or credit transfer matters, the reviewer will examine the relevant assessment or recognition record, feedback, applicable requirements and support arrangements. Any new competency decision will be made by an appropriately credentialled and vocationally competent assessor. Only units meeting their requirements will be awarded; an appeal will not automatically grant competency or credit.

7.3 Decide and implement

The reviewer will provide a reasoned written outcome within the service timeframe, confirming or changing the decision, or identifying further review, information or reassessment needed. The outcome will explain the action, responsible person, expected completion date and right to independent review. Administration will communicate it and track implementation.

Review or reassessment required to correct a STARK error will not attract an additional assessment fee. An appeal itself is not a fourth assessment attempt or a re enrolment. Any genuinely separate new training or assessment service will require the appropriate pathway review and disclosure and acceptance of applicable fees before it begins.

8 Participation while a matter is reviewed

STARK will normally maintain agreed access and defer a disputed adverse enrolment action during internal review where safe, lawful and practicable. Administration will explain and record any necessary interim restriction and its review arrangements. Any continuation during independent review will be considered and communicated according to the circumstances and applicable obligations.

Ordinary agreed obligations continue unless varied in writing. A complaint or appeal will not erase a genuine outcome, create a new payment liability or postpone recording a clear withdrawal notice. Undisputed approved refunds and eligible certification will not be withheld solely because another issue is under review.

9 Applying the related STARK policies

9.1 Pre enrolment and enrolment decisions

For an admission or pathway appeal, the reviewer will use the Pre Training Review, initial interview record, LLN and digital capability review, support plan, recognition records, offer and acceptance, payment record and Enrolment Verification Checklist. The reviewer will check that suitability was considered before the offer and that agreed arrangements were clear.

For fee for service RPL, the review will recognise that one combined pre enrolment and enrolment form is submitted first, followed by interview and eligibility review, pathway confirmation, accepted offer and deposit, enrolment confirmation, induction and commencement. Receipt of the form alone will not be treated as confirmed enrolment or a competency outcome.

9.2 Fees refunds and RPL withdrawal

Accounts will check the accepted agreement, actual payments and applicable pathway under the Fees Payments Refunds and Prepaid Fee Protection Policy V2.3. The reviewer will consider whether the cooling off dates, disclosed deduction, unit pricing, discounts and any protected refund entitlement were correctly applied. The no ordinary refund rule will not prevent a complaint or review of a statutory entitlement.

The reviewer will distinguish the completed unit refund model for eligible structured qualifications longer than one month from the RPL assessment service fee. Under the RPL rule, paid fees are not recalculated by successful unit outcomes after cooling off. Accounts will check that future charges after withdrawal and any separate service were treated under the accepted terms. Successful RPL unit outcomes will be referred for a Statement of Attainment subject to the applicable certification conditions.

Where a refund is approved, Administration will complete and approve the administrative record using the Withdrawal Cancellation and Deferment Form. Accounts will reconcile and approve the calculation. The CEO or current governance authorised reporting manager will give final financial approval within delegation. A person whose decision is under appeal will not determine the review or approve their own disputed calculation; an alternate authorised approver will be appointed where necessary.

Accounts will initiate an approved refund within 10 working days after final approval and payer verification, or sooner if required. The review outcome and financial approval record will be linked. An undisputed refund will not depend on the person withdrawing a complaint or waiving other rights.

9.3 Withdrawal cancellation and deferment

The reviewer will apply the separate processes for deferment, withdrawal after commencement, student initiated cancellation before commencement and STARK initiated cancellation. Administration will supply the form, first notice date, effective date, approved return arrangements or cancellation notice, student response, manager decision and payment records.

The review will check reasons, notice, opportunity to respond, support considered, fee treatment and communications. STARK inability to deliver will be distinguished from cancellation for student related reasons. A pending complaint will not change the original notice date. Where funding applies, staff will follow the governing policy and applicable funding contract or agreement.

10 Independent review

A person dissatisfied with the internal outcome may ask Administration to arrange independent review. STARK will also arrange it where an internal conflict prevents fair review. No fee will be charged for the independent review STARK arranges.

Compliance will identify a suitable external reviewer with no prior involvement or relevant conflict. The reviewer may be an independent VET professional or dispute resolution practitioner, depending on the issue. An assessment decision will remain the responsibility of an appropriately qualified assessor. A referral to a regulator or hotline alone will not replace this review.

Within 10 working days of the request, Administration will confirm the reviewer's identity, independence, scope, contact arrangements and expected timetable. The person may raise a reasonable concern about independence, which Compliance will consider before proceeding. Records will be supplied securely with appropriate authority and privacy safeguards.

The reviewer will confirm the completion timetable in writing. If delayed, Administration will obtain a revised estimate and provide progress updates at least every 10 working days. The reviewer will give written findings and recommendations. STARK will communicate its response and arrange corrections promptly, identifying owners and dates. If a recommendation is not adopted, STARK will explain its reasons and further available avenues, subject to any binding direction or legal obligation.

11 External assistance

People may seek external assistance where the agency has jurisdiction. Administration will help identify a relevant avenue for the person's location and issue and explain known eligibility requirements or costs. External agencies set their own procedures; they are separate from the free independent review STARK arranges.

Organisation	Role and contact
National Training Complaints Hotline	Referral to an appropriate authority; it does not investigate or advocate. 13 38 73 dewr.gov.au/national-training-complaints-hotline
Australian Skills Quality Authority	Receives information about possible regulatory breaches; does not resolve individual fee disputes or act as a student advocate. asqa.gov.au/about-us/how-we-regulate/tip-offs-and-complaints/concerns-about-training-providers
Relevant consumer protection agency	May assist with fees, refunds and service disputes. Administration will identify the agency for the relevant location. For Victoria: consumer.vic.gov.au

An ombudsman, tribunal or other authority may be relevant depending on its jurisdiction. STARK will cooperate with lawful external enquiries and preserve relevant records. Use of an external avenue will not lead to retaliation or remove an available remedy.

12 Records confidentiality and improvement

12.1 Records and tools

Administration will use the Complaints and Appeals Form or recorded correspondence, Complaints and Appeals Register, restricted case file, reviewer outcome record and corrective action record. The register will track the case reference, first receipt, issue, owner, deadlines, review stages, decision, action and closure. Related student management and financial records will be updated only by authorised staff.

Case records will include the original concern, relevant documents, responses, conflict checks, findings, reasons, communications, independent review and implementation evidence. Access will be limited to staff who need it. Complete confidentiality cannot be promised where information must be shared for fairness, safety or legal obligations.

Records will be retained for at least five years after final closure as STARK's internal rule. Longer legal, contractual, assessment or certification retention requirements will prevail. Records will not be destroyed while a related investigation, review or legal matter remains open. Any approved digital or AI assistance will be subject to privacy controls and staff verification; decisions and reasons will remain subject to human review.

12.2 Responsibilities and monitoring

Administration and Student Support will assist people, maintain records and monitor dates. Compliance will manage allocation, conflicts, independent review and corrective action checks. Trainers, assessors, Accounts and relevant third parties will provide records and implement authorised corrections. The CEO will resource the process and exercise delegated authority without determining a case in which they are involved.

Compliance will review recurring issues and root causes, enter improvements in the Continuous Improvement Register and check completion and effectiveness. The policy will be reviewed annually and when requirements, risks or services change. Approval, effective date and publication will be recorded in the policy register.

13 Current standards and related policies

Reference	Application
Outcome Standards 2.7 and 2.8	Sections 2 to 12: accessible complaints, procedural fairness, timeframes, outcomes and independent appeal review.
Outcome Standard 2.1	Sections 2 and 9: information before enrolment and clear review rights.
Outcome Standards 1.4 1.6 and 1.7	Sections 5, 7 and 9: assessment, RPL and credit transfer review.
Outcome Standards 4.2 and 4.4	Sections 3 and 12: assigned responsibilities and improvement.

Related STARK policies: Pre Enrolment and Enrolment V3.0; Fees Payments Refunds and Prepaid Fee Protection V2.3; Withdrawal Cancellation and Deferment V2.2; assessment; RPL; credit transfer; support; privacy; records. The current approved versions and accepted agreements will apply. STARK's service timeframes and five year case retention rule are institutional controls, not fixed periods prescribed by the 2025 Outcome Standards.

Outcome Standards Instrument 2025 Schedule 1

ASQA Feedback Complaints and Appeals Practice Guide

Official guidance checked 10 November 2026. The 2025 Standards apply from 1 July 2025.