

Australian Association of Social Workers

Feedback and Complaints

Policy & Procedure

Version 1.0

May 2026



AASW

Australian Association
of Social Workers

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1. Purpose

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is committed to handling feedback and complaints fairly, promptly and transparently. AASW values feedback as an opportunity to improve its services, decisions and conduct.

This policy explains how AASW receives, reviews and addresses feedback and complaints concerning dissatisfaction from AASW members and the public about decisions made, or services provided by AASW, or concerning the conduct of an AASW employee, volunteer, contractor or third-party performing work for AASW.

AASW will keep the relevant parties informed about decisions and agreed actions as outlined in this policy and procedure.

2. AASW Vision, Purpose and Values

Vision: Wellbeing and social justice in Australia

Purpose: Empowering social workers to make a difference

AASW employees, volunteers and contractors are expected to operate by the aims and intent of our shared **values** as follows:

- Respect: Trust, openness, compassion, and reflection
- Collaboration: Teamwork, shared vision, and collegiality
- Integrity: Responsibility, authenticity, and courage
- Accountability: Engagement and outcome delivery
- Responsiveness: Agility, self-awareness, and curiosity

3. Scope

This policy applies to feedback and complaints relating to dissatisfaction with:

- A decision made by AASW
- A service provided by AASW
- The conduct of an AASW employee, volunteer, or contractor performing work for the AASW.

Feedback and complaints may be made by members of AASW or by members of the public.

This policy does not apply to feedback and complaints about:

- an AASW member (social worker) that has or is alleged to have engaged in unethical conduct or breached the AASW Code of Ethics. These complaints are to be referred to the **AASW Ethics Office**. Refer to the AASW website about *Making a Complaint*.
- an AASW employee who has a complaint about another employee, office holder or Director. Such complaints are resolved under the AASW Grievance & Dispute Resolution Policy.

4. Complaint Thresholds

Feedback and complaints are managed based on **severity, frequency, impact, and risk**.

- **Informal handling** applies to low-level, one-off issues that can be resolved through discussion or manager intervention.
- **Formal complaints** are triggered by repeated behaviour, patterns of conduct, or ongoing policy breaches.
- **Immediate escalation applies to serious matters** (e.g. harassment, safety risks, unlawful behaviour), even if they occur once.

The Human Resources department, Responsible Officer or the Board are responsible for assessing issues against these thresholds and escalating where appropriate. The AASW may escalate any matter where the risk or seriousness warrants it.

5. Policy

5.1 Objectives

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- Establish an open and transparent process for handling and addressing feedback and complaints,
- Establish timeframes for addressing feedback and complaints,
- Ensure all feedback and complaints are handled fairly and objectively, and
- Set out how AASW records, analyses, stores and reviews feedback and complaints.

5.2 Principles

In receiving and addressing feedback and complaints, the AASW will ensure:

- no individual will be subject to retaliation, disadvantage, or adverse treatment for providing feedback or lodging a complaint in good faith. Any such conduct will be

addressed promptly in accordance with AASW policies.

- all complaints and feedback are managed in a respectful and confidential manner,
- AASW will allocate sufficient resources to deal with feedback or complaints, and that people handling it are appropriately trained and skilled to manage it, and
- AASW acknowledges that feedback and complaints are an opportunity for continuous improvement.

5.3 Roles and Responsibilities

The **Board** is responsible for ensuring policy is in place for receiving and addressing feedback and complaints made by AASW members and the public. Complaints received relating to the CEO or the Company Secretary will be referred directly to the Board for assessment and/or investigation and resolution.

The **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** is responsible for oversight of how feedback and complaints are received, handled, and authorising recommended actions to be taken to address any feedback and complaints.

The CEO is also ultimately responsible for the implementation of identified actions within the AASW. In doing so, the CEO may delegate the work of receipt, initial review, investigation and development of recommendations of the feedback and/or complaint, as well as implementation of the identified actions to AASW employees and/or to an external party or organisation.

6. Procedure

6.1 How to raise a Complaint or provide feedback

All complaints need to be made in writing and sent to email: complaints@aasw.asn.au

To help AASW investigate feedback and/or complaints properly, the Complainant needs to include as much information as possible, including:

- Who or what the feedback and/or complaint is about
- A clear description of the issue
- A timeline or chronology of events
- Copies of relevant communications (such as emails)
- Any other information that is relevant

Feedback and/or complaints that do not include enough information may not be accepted.

The person raising feedback and/or complaint will be known as the **Complainant**.

6.2 How feedback and complaints are handled

All feedback and/or complaints are received by the **Chief Executive Office [CEO] office** and handled in accordance with the steps below.

A. Acknowledgement

Feedback and complaints will be acknowledged by the CEO's office within **2 business days**.

Feedback or complaints relating to the CEO or the Company Secretary will be referred by the CEO's office directly to the Board. The Board will only deal with matters relating to the CEO and Company Secretary.

B. Initial Review

The Human Resources department or the Board will conduct an initial review to determine whether:

- The issues are clearly identified; and
- The matter is within AASW's scope and responsibility to take action in respect to the issues raised.

The feedback and/or complaint will then either be accepted or not accepted if not within policy scope.

The feedback and/or complaint will be allocated by Human Resources to a **Responsible Officer** (for example, the relevant General Manager), ensuring the Responsible Officer is independent of the issues raised.

The **Complainant** will be informed of the outcome of the Initial Review.

AASW aims to complete the Initial Review within **10 business days** of receiving the feedback and/or complaints.

C. Investigation

The **Responsible Officer** (or their delegate) or the Board will investigate the feedback or complaint. This may include:

- Reviewing the relevant documents
- Speaking with the **Complainant** and other parties relevant to the feedback and/or complaint where clarification is required
- Requesting additional information or documentation.

If information or meetings cannot be obtained within **5 business days** from when requested, then the investigation will continue using the information available.

Internal and external individuals or agencies may be consulted where appropriate.

After considering all available evidence, the **Responsible Officer** or the Board will determine whether the feedback and/or complaint is:

- Substantiated
- Partially substantiated; or
- Not substantiated

The **Responsible Officer** or the Board will then prepare an investigation outcome detailing:

- The findings
- The reasons for the decision; and
- Any proposed actions.

This outcome will be reviewed and approved by the **Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or the Board Chair**.

The outcome will be communicated to the Complainant by the CEO office or Board Chair. For privacy reasons, some internal actions or information may not be specifically shared.

AASW aims to complete the investigation and communicate the outcome within **30 business days** of receiving feedback and/or complaints.

If more time is required, the **Human Resources Department** will notify the **Complainant** and other parties (where applicable).

D. Complainant Response

The **Complainant** has **10 business days** to respond to the investigation's outcome.

Any response will be considered by the **CEO or the Board** who will make a decision regarding:

- The outcome of feedback and/or complaint; and
- Any remedy or resolution (if applicable).

The **CEO office or Board Chair** will notify other parties affected by the complaint within **10 business days** from the time a final decision has been made.

E. Escalation

The **Complainant** may request a review of the outcome and any remedy or resolution by the CEO or the Board. The request should be made within **15 business days** of the feedback and/or complaint being finalised.

The CEO or the Board will respond within **10 business days**.

The decision of the CEO or the Board is final.

6.3 Possible remedies and actions

Where feedback and/or complaint is **substantiated** or **partially substantiated**, remedies and/or actions may include, but are not limited to:

- Feedback noted
- An apology for the action or inaction that led to the complaint
- An explanation of why the issue occurred, and steps taken to prevent it happening again
- A reversal of a decision
- Providing the means of redress or desired outcome requested by the Complainant
- Any other appropriate action.

6.4 Unreasonable or vexatious feedback or complaints

The **AASW Board** will establish the threshold for and the management of unreasonable, vexatious or frivolous feedback and complaints, and will include considerations such as the frequency and nature of the feedback and complaints, and whether they are raising substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for the parties involved.

The **CEO** will raise complaints that are considered to meet this threshold to the AASW Board. The **AASW Board**, through the **CEO**, will address unreasonable Complainant conduct with the objective of addressing the complaint; however, will ensure that work health and safety requirements are preserved.

6.5 Privacy

The AASW is committed to protecting the privacy of our staff, AASW's Members and the general public's personal information in accordance with AASW's obligations under the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and other relevant state and territory laws. In keeping with this commitment, all personal information AASW collects will be handled in the same way as complaints are handled in AASW's Privacy Policy.

7. Definitions

Term	Definition
Accepted complaint	A complaint that has been submitted and is assessed as meeting the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The issues are clearly identified; and• The matter is within AASW's scope and responsibility to take action in respect to the complaint raised.
Complainant	For this policy, it refers to the person who raised the complaint – whether it is an AASW member or a member of the general public.
Feedback and/or complaint	Dissatisfaction from AASW members and the public about decisions made, or services provided, by AASW, or of the conduct of an AASW employee, volunteer or contractor.

Responsible Officer	The person within AASW (or may be external to AASW) will investigate the feedback or complaint. It is usually a General Manager (or the General Manager's delegate)
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8. Review

The CEO will review this Policy every two (2) years or as often as it is considered necessary to check if it is operating effectively and consider whether changes are required.

The Board may recommend changes to this Policy from time to time by resolution.

9. Related Documents

- Australian Association of Social Workers By-Laws on Ethics 2025.
- Grievance & Dispute Resolution Policy.

10. Appendices

Not applicable.

11. Policy Status

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Approved by:	Kerryn Pennell Chief Executive Officer	Scheduled review date:	May 2028