

**STANDARD OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE (SOP):  
STUDENT COMPLAINTS**

Institution	Eisenburg Agricultural Training Institute			
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Responsibility	<p>Higher Education and Training – Head of Student Affairs</p> <p>Agricultural Skills Development – Vocational Training Coordinator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Academic and/or Administration complaints processing</li> </ul> <p>Manager: Administration and Training Support Services and/or Assistant Manager: Administration and Training Support Services and/or Hostel – Admin Officer (Hostel)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training and support complaints processing</li> </ul> <p>Manager: Administration and Training Support Services and/or Assistant Manager: Administration and Training Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Health and wellness complaints processing</li> </ul>			
Review/Revision/History:	The SOP may be reviewed every two years or as the need arises.			
Compliance:	The process owner is responsible for ensuring that all relevant policies/frameworks are			

	complied with and adhered to.
Monitoring and Evaluation:	The process owner is accountable for monitoring the implementation of the SOP and relevant (SOP) transformational plan.
Development/ Review:	The process owner is responsible for the implementation and review of the SOP
Effective date:	Date of approval by Programme Manager
Annexures:	Process Flow Infographic

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## **1. Purpose**

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is aimed at providing guidelines to students regarding academic and non-academic complaints so that problems, whether of an academic nature or otherwise, can be addressed effectively.

The objectives of the SOP are to:

- Streamline the protocol for students to follow with regard to academic and non-academic complaints.
- Enables students to express challenges concerning the provision of a service or services by EATI.
- Clarify the communication channels to be followed for resolving student problems with regard to both academic and non-academic matters.
- Increase the awareness of lecturers, administrative staff and students of the complaints procedure.
- Increase the efficiency of the complaints procedure.

## **2. Legislative Framework**

This SOP is mandated by the following Acts, White Papers, Regulations and Directives:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996;
- The Constitution of the Western Cape, 1998;
- Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998;
- The Public Service Act, 1994;
- The Skills Development Act, 97 of 1998;
- Higher Education Act, 1997;
- The South African Qualifications Authority Act, 58 of 1995;
- The Public Finance Management Act, 1 of 1999;
- The Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2 of 2000;
- The Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 3 of 2000;
- The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 4 of 2000;
- White Paper on Public Service Training and Education, 1996;
- White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service, 1997;
- The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service, 1997;
- The White Paper on Affirmative Action on the Public Service, 1998;
- National Treasury Regulations; and
- Provincial Treasury Directives.

## **3. Relevant Institutional policies/documents/manuals/handbooks**

EATI Rules and Regulations

#### 4. Acronyms and Abbreviations

- AET - Agricultural Education and Training  
 EATI - Elsenburg Agricultural Training Institute  
 ICT - Information Communication and Technology  
 CD - Chief Director  
 OCD - Office of the Chief Director: Agricultural Education & Training

#### 5. Definitions

For the purpose of this SOP, unless otherwise stated, the following definitions shall apply:

Term	Definition
Complainant	The aggrieved person: the person lodging a complaint.
Complaint	An action or a statement that expresses dissatisfaction about any behaviour that someone perceives to be unfair, discriminatory, provocative, unwelcome, prejudicial or unjustified and which requires prompt action or a response.
Confidentiality	A process in which all the information and records about a complaint are classified as secret/private and personal, are entrusted to the Institute and employees concerned and stored in a safe place. (Note: Implicitly, this term embodies notions of "rights" and "obligations" as stipulated in the Promotion to Access to Information Act (Act 2 of 2000) viz.: <p>(a) The student and all persons involved in the complaint have a just expectation (right) that the Institute and employees involved in the problem- resolution process will not divulge any matters pertaining to the matter to any other body or person (obligation);</p> <p>(b) The Institute has a duty (obligation) and is accountable for ensuring that all records pertaining to the complaint are stored in a secure place with limited authorised access, provided that the release of such information is not authorised by law.</p>
Resolution	A process whereby a complaint is solved or addressed.
Student	A student registered for a qualification or programme and includes depending on the context, a prospective or former student.
Upheld/not upheld	Support or endorse/not support or endorse.
Procedural Fairness	A process whereby a student's complaint will be resolved using fair procedures as dictated by the Institute's rules and regulations for students. Fair and proper procedures

	are the basic principles of the Institute when dealing with student complaints.
Reasonable	Having sound judgement; fair and sensible.
Process Owner	The official responsible for the governance of process performance and process change.

## 6. Organisational Scope

- The SOP is applicable to all registered students.
- A group of students may use this procedure to make a collective request provided that one student identifies him/herself as the main contact for purposes of communication.
- This student complaints procedure may be used to enquire about any aspect of the academic, administrative, and student support services (this includes the Hostel, Facilities and Information Communication and Technology (ICT) services.)
- These serve as guidelines of a general nature. In general, the Elsenburg Agricultural Training Institute (EATI) follows an open-door policy with regard to dealing with student complaints.

## 7. Protocol

The Elsenburg Agricultural Training Institute aims to provide effective communication channels or routes for resolving student problems, whether of an academic or non-academic nature. The basic principle is that a problem should be solved at the lowest Stage possible. All registered students should know what procedures to follow when they have academic and/or non-academic complaints. All academic and administrative staff should also be aware of these procedures.

To achieve these objective: the Institute will:

- Communicate the complaints protocol to all stakeholders.
- Ensure implementation College-wide.
- Monitor the progress of the complaints process.
- Treat students' problems with the appropriate sensitivity, confidentiality and measure of seriousness and endeavour to solve problems as quickly as possible.

### Recording and monitoring of student complaints

Records of all complaints will be kept on the student portal.

Such reports will:

- Feed into the monitoring and evaluation procedure
- Feed directly into appropriate EATI committees;
- Assist in identifying problems and trends across the college;
- Form the basis of positive publicity, in demonstrating that identified issues have been resolved; and
- Be provided to the OCD on a quarterly basis.

## 8. Implementation

The Chief Director may task the Deputy Director: Quality Assurance and Transformation Management (or another appropriate staff member) with the responsibility for implementing the protocol as well as creating greater awareness of its existence.

The Directors, Deputy Directors and/or Faculty Managers will be responsible for the implementation of this protocol in the faculties as well as creating greater awareness of its existence among both staff and students.

## 9. Complaints

### 9.1. Grounds for Complaints

Without limiting the circumstances that may give rise to a complaint, a student has valid grounds for making a complaint when he/she considers that he/she has been adversely affected by one or more of the following:

- irregular or negligent behaviour by a Institute employee and/or external partners with whom students interact as part of their programme of study and/or at sporting and recreational functions;
- failure by a Institute employee to act fairly;
- irregular behaviour by fellow students;
- a decision based on insufficient consideration to specific facts, evidence and or circumstances pertaining to the student;
- failure by the Institute to make a decision within a reasonable time- frame;
- awarding a penalty that is perceived as being too harsh.

### 9.2. Types of Complaints

Type of Student Support Service/s	Categories	Responsible Person/Component
Academic and/or Administration	Matters in relation to <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a module or programme of study</li><li>• an EATI staff member</li><li>• another student</li><li>• registration</li><li>• admission</li></ul>	Higher Education and Training (B.Agric, Diploma in Agriculture and Equine) – Head of Student Affairs Agricultural Skills Development – Vocational Training Coordinator
Training and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facilities</li><li>• Hostel</li><li>• ICT</li></ul>	Manager: Administration and Training Support Services Hostel – Admin Officer and House Parents

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct</li> <li>• Harassment</li> <li>• Any other support services provided by the EATI</li> </ul>	
Health and wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional and confidential Counselling and Psychosocial/Psycological Services</li> </ul>	Manager: Administration and Training Support Services

## 10. Process Flow

### 10.1. Making a Request and expected time limits

Where possible, these deadlines should be adhered to and appropriate reasons should be given promptly to the student when the time deadlines are not feasible.

	Student	Responsible Component
Stage 1	Lodge complaint/request within 1 week of the unsatisfactory circumstances occurring.	Either respond to the complaint within one week of receipt, or revert to an alternative time period.
Stage 2	Should be raised within 1 week of outcome of Stage 1 request	Either respond to the complaint within one week of receipt, or revert to an alternative time period.
Stage 3	Should be raised within 1 week of outcome of Stage 2 request	Either respond to the complaint within one week of receipt, or revert to an alternative time period.
Stage 4	Should be raised within 1 month of the date of the Completion of Review letter	Variable

### 10.2. Completion of Procedures

- The student will be informed of the outcome of the complaint.
- Once the internal, formal student complaints procedure has been completed, and if the student is still not happy with the outcome, they may take their request to the Office of the Chief Director: Agricultural Education and Training (OCD). The OCD will not normally look at a request unless and until all relevant internal, formal Student Complaints procedures have been exhausted.



10.3. Requests made directly to the Office of the Chief Director:

Requests are handled most effectively by following the guidance in this procedure. If a request is made directly to the Office of the Chief Director, rather than by following this procedure, the CD's office will refer the student to the Student Administration to administer the correct procedure.

10.4. Procedures for the handling of student complaints

There are 4 Stages to the student complaints procedure:

**Stage 1: Informal**

- Students are expected to try to resolve a matter directly, informally, and quickly with the person concerned; i.e. with regard to academic issues, Speak directly to the relevant lecturer, or Student Representative Council.
- Submit complaint/request no later than 1 week after the unfavourable conditions have occurred.
- The student must explain clearly what is required and what is to be achieved.
- The staff member must attend to the request and attempt to resolve it in a straightforward, reasonable, and prompt manner.
- Staff members are encouraged to meet with the student whenever practical to establish the exact cause of the student's dissatisfaction and to foster a mutual understanding of the issues involved.
- Staff members are encouraged to make notes of any meetings and keep a record of the agreed outcome.
- Notes must be shared with the student.
- The student should be notified that the matter is deemed to be resolved.
- Staff must advise the student of the availability of Stage 2 of the student complaints procedure if the request is not upheld.

**Stage 2: Formal**

Should the student not be able to resolve the issue informally (see above), the complaint must be captured on the student portal within 1 week of notification of the outcome of Stage 1. The portal can be accessed by the following link:

<https://student-sis-elsenburg.westerncape.gov.za/>

The student should capture the complaint on the Student Portal to set out:

- what their complaint/requirement is;
- Explanation of the failure to reach an informal agreement;
- what is the evidence that supports it;
- what outcome they want.

Upon completion the following process will follow:

- The formal complaint will be attended to by the Student Administration Office.
- The complaint will be assigned to the relevant component.
- Only complaints logged on the Student Portal will be dealt with to allow tracking and reporting.
- If the complaint does not set out clearly the points indicated above, the student will be asked to

resubmit the complaint in a manner that enables proper consideration of the need/requirement to take place.

- The relevant component will administer the complaint and ensure that an investigation is carried out before a response is provided to the student on the system. The investigation and its outcome must be fair and reasonable.
- If the responsible component finds in favour of the student, they may decide on whatever redress they think appropriate, bearing in mind the outcome sought by the student.
- If the complaint is not upheld, the student will be notified of the availability of Stage 3 of the student complaints procedure.
- The reply will be sent within 1 week of receipt of the complaint by the relevant component. If the investigation will take longer than 1 week, the student will be informed of the reason and an expected date of response.

### **Stage 3: Formal and Escalation**

For Stage 3, the complaint must be logged within 1 week of notification of the outcome of the Stage 2 request and the following process will follow:

- The complaint will be heard by the Manager (the reviewer) of the staff member who dealt with the Stage 2 complaint.
- The Manager will review the request and exercise discretion and judgement as to whether further investigation is necessary.

The student should indicate whether the complaint:

- must be escalated;
- why they believe the decision made at Stage 2 was not fair or reasonable;
- how the procedure for the Stage 2 complaint was procedurally unfair (if applicable) and how this made a significant difference to the outcome of their need/requirements.
- Set out the grounds of the request by referring to those standards and must provide evidence to support their claim.
- The reviewer will arrange for further investigation to take place.
- In reaching a decision, the reviewer is expected to be fair and reasonable.
- A request without adequate grounds and evidence will be dismissed.
- Once a decision has been made, the reviewer will respond within 1 week of receipt of the complaint or an alternate date, with reason, will be provided.
- The student and the relevant component will be notified if the complaint is upheld or not.

### **Stage 4: Review letter**

Once the Institute's internal processes are exhausted, the Institute will issue a completion of review letter by email. If a student is still of the opinion that his/her case remains unresolved he/she may lodge and appeal to the Chief Director/Principal for additional assistance.

**To avoid delays in the resolution of complaints, students are strongly advised to begin at Stage 1.**

## **11. Withdrawal of complaints**

A student may withdraw a complaint or grievance at any stage during the complaint/grievance resolution process in which case the matter will be concluded and deemed to be resolved. If the complaint or grievance was originally made in writing, the notice of withdrawal must also be in writing.

# STUDENT COMPLAINTS PROCESS

I have a complaint, what now?



1



**Q: How do I start?**

**Informal:** Discuss unfavourable conditions with the person concerned within 1 week of its occurrence.

2



**Q: What do I do if it is not resolved?**

**Formal:** Capture complaint on student portal.  
Student Admin assign complaint to relevant component.  
Component will respond to you within 1 week.

3



**Q: It is still not resolved. What now?**

**Formal & Escalation:** Log complaint within 1 week of outcome of Stage 2.  
Reviewer respond within 1 week of receipt of complaint.

4



**Final Stage: Review letter**

The College will issue a Completion of Review letter to you.  
If unresolved, you can appeal to the Principal.

5



**Q: What should I include in my complaint?**

- What your complaint/requirement is
- The evidence that supports your complaint
- What outcome you expect

6

**IMPORTANT!**

- Always start at Stage 1
- Try and resolve matters directly with the person concerned.
- Link to student portal:

<https://student-sis-elsenburg.westerncape.gov.za/>



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Government  
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Communication that works  
**FOR YOU.**