

COMPLAINTS HANDLING Procedure



INTRODUCTION

St James Lutheran College is a complex organisation. It values each of its members and believes that a clear process for the resolution and monitoring of conflict, complaints and grievances is in the best interests of all.

- The purpose of this document is to provide employees and other community members with the opportunity to have a complaint dealt with formally through the most appropriate channels, speedily and flexibly.
- The objectives of these procedures are to promote the prompt resolution of grievances at the lowest level possible by consultation, cooperation and discussion, and to promote efficiency, effectiveness and equity within St James Lutheran College.
- The process followed will be confidential and all related documentation securely stored. Any complaints are a matter between the parties directly concerned and those involved in this procedure. However, St James Lutheran College may be required to release confidential information under legal requirement and/or to ensure the safety or welfare of others.

SCOPE

These procedures extend to complaints brought by any St James Lutheran College employee or other St James Lutheran College community member.

Some grievances are better handled under other policies and procedures of Lutheran Education Queensland. Lutheran Education Queensland has specific policies and procedures in place for issues such as workplace discrimination.

Where a complaint is raised by an employee and falls within the scope of the Queensland Lutheran Schools Single Enterprise Agreement (Annexure C – Grievance Procedure), that procedure must be followed as the primary pathway. This College procedure applies only to employee complaints outside the scope of the EA, and to complaints raised by students, parents, volunteers, or other community members.

PROCEDURE

For employees, the grievance and dispute resolution process is set out in Annexure C of the Queensland Lutheran Schools Single Enterprise Agreement. That procedure applies as the overarching framework. This College procedure is consistent with Annexure C and applies to employee complaints not covered by the EA, and to complaints raised by students, parents, volunteers, or community members.

As stated in above, the objective (where appropriate) is to resolve the complaint at the lowest level possible.

LEVEL 1: INFORMAL RESOLUTION (AFFECTED PARTIES MEET)

St James Lutheran College recognises that often complaints are simple misunderstandings that are easily resolved via effective communication.

- Wherever possible and appropriate, complaints should first be addressed informally between the parties directly involved, in a timely and respectful manner.
- The goal is to clarify misunderstandings, explore each other's perspectives, and resolve issues through goodwill and open communication.

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- Notes of any informal discussions and agreed outcomes should be kept by the parties.
- If the grievance cannot be resolved satisfactorily, within a mutually acceptable time frame, or the seriousness of the matter is not suitable for resolution informally, the Complainant may proceed to Level 2.

LEVEL 2: ASSISTED RESOLUTION (THIRD PARTY INVOLVEMENT)

At this level, the Complainant refers their complaint to a third party facilitator to help the parties to identify the disputed issues, understand the perspective of the other, develop options, promote co-operation, consider alternatives and endeavour to reach a mutual agreement the parties are prepared to abide by.

- If the complaint cannot be resolved at Level 1, the complainant may refer the matter to an appropriate third party (e.g. supervisor, Executive Team member, or Complaints Coordinator).
- The third party will facilitate a process to help the parties identify disputed issues, understand perspectives, and work towards a mutual agreement.
- A neutral facilitator/mediator may be used. Both parties may be accompanied by a support person.
- Outcomes, agreements, or points of disagreement should be documented and shared with both parties.

If the complaint cannot be resolved satisfactorily at this level, within a mutually acceptable time frame or the seriousness of the matter warrants, the Complainant may proceed to Level 3.

LEVEL 3: FORMAL RESOLUTION (PRINCIPAL / SCHOOL COUNCIL)

At this level, the Complainant refers their complaint, preferably in writing, to the Principal for resolution. Complaints in writing may be handed into the School Office marked confidential and or emailed to stjames.principal@stjameslc.qld.edu.au However, should the grievance involve the Principal, it shall be referred to the Chair of the St James Lutheran College Council.

- The Principal (or, if the complaint involves the Principal, the Chair of the College Council) will oversee the process, which may include investigation, findings, and a written determination.
- Complaints are documented in the Complaints Register, and both complainant and respondent will be afforded natural justice and procedural fairness (e.g. right to know allegations, right to respond, support person present, decisions free from bias).
- Possible outcomes may include management action, policy changes, counselling, disciplinary action, referral to external authorities (e.g. Police in the case of criminal matters), or external escalation to other statutory bodies.

Referral to the Principal should resolve most, if not all complaints. However, if the complaint is still not resolved at this level, then the Complainant may properly refer a matter in writing to the Chair of the St James Lutheran College Council and marked confidential or emailed to schoolcouncilchair@stjameslc.qld.edu.au

GENERAL GUIDELINES

The following principles guide the handling of all complaints at St James Lutheran College. They ensure that the process is consistent, fair, respectful, and aligned with both our Christian values and legal obligations.

- **Confidentiality:** All complaints will be handled sensitively, with details shared only on a need-to-know basis.
- **Protection from Victimisation:** No adverse action is to be taken against any person for raising or responding to a complaint in good faith.
- **Vexatious Complaints:** Complaints that are found to be malicious or without reasonable grounds may result in disciplinary action.

- **Right to Support:** Both the complainant and the respondent may have a support person or representative present at all stages of the process.
- **Timeliness:** Complaints should be assessed and responded to as promptly as possible.
- **Fairness:** Complaints will be addressed in accordance with principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.
- **Investigations:** Where deemed appropriate, investigations will be conducted thoroughly, with care, and with sensitivity to the privacy and wellbeing of individuals.

EMPLOYEES

In line with Annexure C of the Queensland Lutheran Schools Single Enterprise Agreement, employees are entitled to fair, transparent, and supportive processes when raising or responding to complaints. The following principles apply:

- Employees may have a support person or representative of their choosing, including a union representative, present at any stage of the complaints process.
- While the Complaints Handling Procedure is underway, employees are expected to continue their normal duties where appropriate.
- All parties are encouraged to maintain written records, such as diary notes of dates, discussions, and agreed actions.

SENIOR STAFF AND THE PRINCIPAL

St James Lutheran College acknowledges that Complainants are entitled to raise a complaint in good faith.

- A complaint shall be assessed and (if deemed appropriate) investigated in a thorough, fair and impartial manner.
- If a member of the Executive Team is unable to resolve the issue, they are to advise the Complainant to take the complaint to the next step of the process.
- The Principal should advise the parties directly concerned, in writing, at Level 3 of:
 - The decision taken by St James Lutheran College;
 - A summary of the reasons for the decision made;
 - What and when follow up action, if any, is to be taken.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- St James Lutheran College Complaints Handling Policy.
- Queensland Lutheran Schools Single Enterprise Agreement 2024 (Annexure C)