Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR)
Policy & Procedure 10 - Making Complaints about Accredited Sonography Courses

1. Preamble

The purpose of this Policy and Procedure is to ensure that any complaints submitted to ASAR in regard to Accredited Sonography Courses are brought to a satisfactory resolution.

2. Policy Principles

Consumers and stakeholders of accredited sonography education must be confident that any complaints they have will be dealt with efficiently, effectively, transparently and fairly and that any quality issues identified are addressed.

ASAR is committed to ensuring that all accredited sonographer education meets the eight Standards for the Accreditation of Sonography Courses (SASC). In order to achieve this ASAR must apply the accreditation principles and ensure Course Providers continue to deliver courses of the highest academic and professional quality.

If complaints are made about any ASAR accredited courses attempts should be made to resolve the matter informally in the first instance. If informal resolution cannot be achieved, the matter should be investigated in accordance with the principles of fairness and natural justice for all concerned.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

1. ASAR Board of Directors;
2. ASAR Course Assessor Pool;
3. ASAR Executive Officer:
4. ASAR Secretariat;
5. Course Providers delivering accredited sonography training; and
6. Complainants.

4. Definitions

Accreditation
For the purpose of this policy accreditation means that an ultrasound course has been assessed by ASAR as complying with all the ASAR Standards for the Accreditation of Sonography Courses (SASC).

Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR)
Policy & Procedure 10 - Making Complaints about Accredited Sonography Courses

Accreditation Framework
The Accreditation Framework establishes the policies, procedures and standards within which sonography courses are granted accreditation for a specified time, having met transparent and defined requirements. The accreditation framework includes:

a. the Course Accreditation Application Pack,
b. supporting policies, procedures, and
c. Standards for the Accreditation of Sonography Courses (SASC).

Australian Sonographers Association
The Australian Sonographers Association (ASA) is the peak body and leading voice for sonographers in Australia. The ASA guides the advancement of the sonography profession to ensure the community has access to quality sonographic services.

Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry
Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR) accredits ultrasound courses offered by various providers and establishes the criteria against which all courses are to be assessed. ASAR also maintains a register of accredited medical and student sonographers, with the continuing professional development (CPD) activities of accredited medical sonographers recorded and monitored.

ASAR Accredited Programs
Sonography training or education programs that have meet the eight Standards for the Accreditation of Sonography Courses

ASAR Accredited Qualifications
Sonography Qualifications that are awarded following successful completion of training or education courses that have meet the eight Standards for the Accreditation of Sonography Courses

ASAR Board of Directors
The ASAR Board of Directors is the body appointed by the members of the company to take responsibility for achieving ASAR's objects.

The number and nature of Directors is defined in section V of the ASAR Constitution.

ASAR Constitution
The ASAR Constitution sets out the rules governing the conduct of the organisation.

Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR)
Policy & Procedure 10 - Making Complaints about Accredited Sonography Courses

ASAR Secretariat
The ASAR Secretariat is the ASAR office management.

Course
A course is the full program of study and experiences required to be undertaken before a qualification recognised under the AQF and approved by a regulatory authority can be conferred. Some organisations will also use the term 'program' to refer to a course.

Course Owner
The course owner is the legal entity that is the proponent or applicant for the course for the purpose of establishing a nationally recognised course in either the VET or Higher Education Sector.

Course Provider
The course provider is the organisation that issues the testamur for a nationally recognised course and is responsible for learning and assessment including in situations when the course provider enters into contracting or auspicing agreement for the delivery and assessment.

The course owner and provider may be one organisation.

Higher Education Provider
A higher education provider is a body that is established or recognised by or under the law of the Australian Government, a State, the Australian Capital Territory or the Northern Territory to issue qualifications in the higher education sector.

Registered Training Organisation
A Registered Training Organisation (RTO) is a provider that is established or recognised by or under the law of the Australian Government or a State or Territory, to issue qualifications in the vocational education and training sector.

Sonographer
A Sonographer is a highly skilled medical imaging professional who utilises ultrasound imaging systems to undertake diagnostic medical sonographic examinations across a range of contexts.

Training Organisation
In the context of this policy and procedure a Training Organisation is either an RTO or higher education provider delivering or wishing to deliver accredited Sonography courses.

5. Complaints considered by ASAR

This policy and procedure explains how ASAR will respond to complaints about:

1. breaches of the eight Standards for the Accreditation of Sonography Courses (SASC) by a course provider delivering accredited sonography courses, and
2. their own service and actions.

These complaints may be from students and other clients, industry, and licensing bodies or other stakeholders.

Breach of standards, other than the SASC, is to be directed to the appropriate accrediting or regulatory organisation.

5.1. Complaints about the services of a Course Provider

Students and other clients including employers, who have a complaint about a Course Provider, should, in the first instance lodge their complaint directly with that organisation. It is a requirement of the SASC that all providers of accredited sonography courses must have a complaints procedure in place.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the handling of their complaint by the Course Provider or there are extenuating circumstances that preclude the complainant from lodging their complaint directly, they may lodge their complaint with ASAR.

5.2. Complaints about the services and actions of ASAR

If a stakeholder of accredited sonography education wishes to make a complaint about ASAR they should lodge their complaint directly with the ASAR Secretariat.

6. Making a Complaint about a Course Provider

A complaint may be lodged in person or by telephone, by fax, electronically (for example email) or by letter. A verbal complaint may subsequently need to be made in writing to enable full investigation.

Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR)
Policy & Procedure 10 - Making Complaints about Accredited Sonography Courses

Where a complaint is made by an individual or organisation against a Course Provider delivering accredited sonography courses the following procedure will apply:

a. The complaint is to be made to the Executive Officer
b. ASAR will acknowledge receipt of a complaint within five working days informing the complainant of the investigation procedure and that they will keep them informed of progress.
c. The Course Provider that is the subject of the complaint will be informed of the nature of the complaint and given an opportunity to respond. Based on the response received, ASAR will decide whether to investigate the complaint further, and also the manner and scope of any further investigation.

6.1. Informal resolution

Informal attempts shall be made to resolve the complaint in the first instance by agreement with the complainant and the Course Provider. These must be completed within ten working days of the complaint being received by ASAR, and a record of the outcome must be made in writing.

The informal investigation may be carried out by the Executive Officer, or they may engage a member of the ASAR Course Assessor Pool, preferably with some experience in conciliation to assist in the informal resolution stage.

6.2. Formal resolution

If the complaint is not resolved by informal agreement within ten working days, the following formal procedure shall be invoked.

a. The Executive Officer shall commission a senior member of the ASAR Course Assessor Pool who has acted as Chair or Lead Assessor with appropriate experience, to investigate all the circumstances and prepare a written report within a further ten working days. The investigator may access any information or speak to any person relevant to the complaint.
b. The written report and the written complaint must be considered at the next Board meeting by the ASAR Board of Directors
c. After considering all the evidence, and calling for more evidence if the initial report is not sufficient, the ASAR Board of Directors must decide to:
    i. Dismiss the complaint; or
    ii. Uphold the complaint; and
    iii. Decide on disciplinary action against the Course Provider as appropriate and in proportion to the seriousness of the offence; or

iv. In the case of a serious breach of the SASC, revoke accreditation status of the course. In the event accreditation status is revoked, students already enrolled in the course will be allowed to complete their studies.

d. The Executive Officer is to draft a written report on the findings of the ASAR Board of Directors within ten days of the decision having been made.

6.3. Reporting

Within ten days of the decision in relation to a complaint having been made and in accordance with established procedures for disclosure of information, the Executive Officer will inform the parties of the outcomes of the investigation and any actions to be taken. The parties will also be informed of any further avenues they may follow to resolve any outstanding issues arising from the complaint.

6.4. Actions

The Executive Officer is to:

- Instigate the disciplinary action approved by the ASAR Board of Directors; or
- On the ASAR Board of Directors' recommendation, revoke the accreditation status of the course.
- Complaints received will also be taken into account when the Course Provider applies for reaccreditation of the course in question.

6.5. Unsatisfactory Outcome

If a complainant or the Course Provider feels that the outcome of a complaint is unsatisfactory, they may seek further advice from an outside agency such as relevant state or territory ombudsman, commissioner, ASAR Board of Directors or review tribunal, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission or the Anti-Discrimination Board.

7. Making a Complaint regarding the ASAR

If a stakeholder of an ASAR accredited sonography course wishes to make a complaint about the services and actions of ASAR they should lodge their complaint directly with the ASAR Secretariat.

7.1. Acknowledgement

A complaint will be acknowledged within five working days.

7.2. Investigation

The complaint will be investigated by the Executive Officer.

7.3. Reporting

Once the Executive Officer has made a decision in relation to the complaint, they will, within five working days, inform the complainant of the outcome in writing and any actions to be taken.

7.4. Appeals

If the stakeholder is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint investigation, the Executive Officer will indicate further avenues of complaint or appeal to follow. These further avenues may include lodging the complaint with the Chair of the ASAR Board of Directors or using the processes available through an outside agency such as relevant state or territory ombudsman, commissioner, Board or review tribunal, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission or the Anti-Discrimination Board.

8. Complaints outside the authority of ASAR

Where a complaint is lodged with ASAR, and the complaint is not within their authority, the complainant will be referred to the most appropriate authority for handling the complaint. Linkages are maintained between organisations (including other relevant government agencies) to facilitate the referral of complaints and to aid consideration of complaints that raise cross-jurisdictional issues.

9. Procedure Summary – Complaint against a Course Provider

Trigger	Timeframe	Complainant Action	ASAR Action	Responsibility
An issue arises with a Course Provider offering accredited courses		A complaint is lodged with a Course Provider		
Complaint not satisfactorily resolved		Lodge the complaint with ASAR		
A complaint about a Course Provider is received	Within five working days		Acknowledge receipt of a complaint	ASAR Secretariat

			Determine if the complaint requires investigation	Executive Officer
			Inform Course Provider and give them an opportunity to respond	Executive Officer
			Decide to investigate further, and manner and scope of the investigation	Executive Officer
Pursue informal resolution	Completed within ten working days of receiving complaint			Executive Officer or member of the ASAR Course Assessor Pool
Formal resolution procedure required	Within ten working days of receiving complaint		Investigate all the circumstances and prepare a written report	Senior member of the ASAR Course Assessor Pool
	Within a further ten working days		Prepare a written report	Senior member of the ASAR Course Assessor Pool
	Within a further ten working days / at the next ASAR Board of Directors meeting		Written report and the written complaint considered. Further evidence can be called for	ASAR Board of Directors

Decision made			Decision made to dismiss or uphold complaint	ASAR Board of Directors
	Within ten days of the decision		Inform the parties of the outcomes of the investigation and any actions to be taken	Executive Officer
Complaint upheld			Instigate disciplinary action	Executive Officer
Unsatisfactory Outcome		Seek further advice from an outside agency		

10. Procedure Summary – Complaint against ASAR

Trigger	Timeframe	Complainant Action	ASAR Action	Responsibility
An issue arises with ASAR in regard to accredited courses		Lodge the complaint with ASAR		
A complaint about a Course Provider is received	Within five working days		Acknowledge receipt of a complaint	ASAR Secretariat
			Determine if the complaint requires investigation	Executive Officer
			Decide manner and scope of the investigation	Executive Officer

Resolution required			Investigate all the circumstances and prepare a written report	Executive Officer
	Within five working days of receiving complaint		Inform the complainant of the outcomes of the investigation and any actions to be taken	Executive Officer
Unsatisfactory Outcome			Indicate further avenues of complaint or appeal to follow	Executive Officer
		Seek further advice from an outside agency		

11. Tools & Templates

The following tools and templates are to be used when managing complaints against Course Providers and ASAR:

- 10.1 - Notice of Complaint Against a Course Provider
- 10.2 - Notice of Complaint Against ASAR
- 10.3 - Letter Acknowledging Receipt of Complaint
- 10.4 - Letter Informing Course Provider of Receipt of Complaint
- 10.5 - Complaint Investigation Report Template
- 10.6 - Letter Informing Complainant of the outcome of the Investigation of the Complaint
- 10.7 - Letter Informing Course Provider of the outcome of the Investigation of the Complaint – including disciplinary action to be taken

12. Supporting Documentation

Organisations seeking accreditation or re-accreditation are advised that the application pack must be read in conjunction with:

- The Standards for the Accreditation of Sonography Courses available from the ASAR website.
- The ASA Competency Standards for the Entry Level Sonographer available from the ASA website.

13. Related Policies and Procedures

The other ASAR Policies and Procedures which relate to this document are

- ASAR P&P 6 - Reporting Accreditation Decisions
- ASAR P&P 7 - Lodging an Appeal Against a Course Accreditation Decision

14. Complaints

Any complaints regarding this policy should go through the ASAR complaints procedure.

Version	Authorisation	Approval Date	Effective Date
V2-01	Michelle Pedretti, Chair, ASAR Board	03/12/2012	03/12/2012
V2-02	Michelle Pedretti, Chair, ASAR Board	01/05/2015	05/01/2015
V2-02	Christopher Edwards, Chair, ASAR Board	01/05/2019	01/05/2019