Appeals Policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all appeals raised by students, personnel, or other stakeholders regarding decisions made by the organisation are managed fairly, transparently, and consistently. The appeals process is designed to uphold the principles of natural justice and ensure that all parties are treated equitably.

This policy applies to all appeals relating to decisions made by the organisation, including but not limited to:

- Application outcomes.
- Assessment outcomes.
- Disciplinary actions.
- Complaints resolution outcomes.

This policy and processes implemented are aligned to requirements outlined in *ISO 10002:2018 Quality management – Customer satisfaction – Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations.*

Scope – domestic students and school partnerships

This policy applies to domestic VET students, including students under 18 in school-based delivery, prospective and former students affected by a Shafston decision, and decisions made by partner schools, employees, trainers, assessors and contracted third parties on Shafston's behalf. Reviewable decisions include assessment results, RPL or credit transfer, enrolment, progression, fees/refunds, conduct, suspension, cancellation and outcomes of complaints.

Students can lodge directly with Shafston in person, by telephone, email or writing; a school-based student may also be supported by the school VET coordinator or Trainer. Shafston remains responsible for decisions made by third parties acting for it. Appeal information is published on the domestic website and in the domestic Student Handbook.

Approach

Shafston's appeals process reflects the fourteen (14) guiding principles as outlined in ISO 10002:2018 (refer Complaints Policy).

Shafston is committed to providing a fair and transparent appeals process that allows individuals to seek a review of decisions that directly affect them. All appeals are managed in a timely, impartial, and confidential manner.

Shafston's appeals process reflects the following key expectations:

- Right to appeal. All stakeholders have the right to lodge an appeal if they believe a decision was unfair or incorrect.
- Accessibility. The appeals process is easily accessible and user-friendly.
- Transparency and procedural fairness. Appeals are handled impartially, with a clear process and open communication at all stages.
- Timeliness. Appeals are acknowledged and resolved promptly, with clear timeframes communicated to all parties.
- Continuous improvement. Outcomes of appeals inform continuous improvement within the organisation.

Stakeholders are informed about avenues for appeal with information about how to make an appeal publicly available and easily accessible, including via the Shafston **Student Handbook** and website.

Grievances or issues not pertaining to decisions made by the organisation should be referred to Shafston's complaints process.

Shafston provides culturally respectful appeals support and will arrange suitable culturally informed assistance where appropriate and requested. Any specialist involvement will be documented and subject to privacy and consent requirements.

Support and parents/guardians

Students can request reasonable adjustments, translation or literacy assistance and a support person at any meeting. For students under 18, a parent/guardian or school representative may provide support if appropriate and with due regard to the student's wishes, privacy, maturity, safety and applicable consent requirements. A student may lodge an appeal without parental involvement, including when involving the parent would pose a risk. Schools and parents will be notified only when appropriate and lawful.

No student is penalised merely for submitting an appeal. Training and enrolment ordinarily continue during review, subject to lawful safety or disciplinary action; the basis for any exception is documented.

Grounds for an Appeal

Appeals may be considered valid and accepted for review under the following grounds:

- Procedural fairness or irregularity. Where it is believed that the original decision was made without following established procedures or policies, resulting in an unfair or biased outcome.
- New evidence. When new, relevant evidence becomes available that was not considered during the original decision-making process, and this evidence has the potential to affect the outcome.
- Incorrect or unjust application of policies or standards. If it is believed that the policies, procedures, or standards were incorrectly applied or interpreted, leading to an unjust decision.
- Bias or conflict of interest. If there is evidence of bias, discrimination, or a conflict of interest by the person(s) involved in making the original decision.
- Assessment outcome disputes. When a student believes that an assessment decision was unfair, inconsistent with assessment criteria, or not conducted in accordance with the organisation's assessment policies and standards.
- Severity of outcome or penalty. If the appellant believes the outcome or penalty applied was disproportionate, harsh, or unreasonable in relation to the situation.

These grounds ensure that appeals are raised on legitimate and substantive bases, supporting the organisation's commitment to fairness, transparency, and continuous improvement.

Shafston's internal appeals process is free and easily accessible and facilitates requests for a review of decisions, including assessment decisions, made by Shafston or a third party representative providing services on Shafston's behalf.

The appeals process follows the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness by allowing anyone subject to a decision by Shafston, or anyone who has allegations made against them, to tell their side of the story before a decision is made.

Shafston maintains a student appellant's enrolment during any appeal process.

Shafston's process ensures that the decision-maker is independent of the decision being reviewed (for example, an assessor does not consider or decide an appeal against an assessment decision they made).

Assessment and decision integrity

An assessment appeal must be reviewed by an appropriately qualified, impartial assessor who did not make the original decision. The reviewer considers the unit requirements, assessment instructions, evidence, feedback, reasonable adjustments, authenticity concerns and any fresh relevant evidence. Outcomes may include confirming or amending the decision, reconsideration by an independent assessor or appropriate reassessment, with reasons recorded.

Where academic integrity or AI use is disputed, an automated detection score or similarity result is not conclusive proof. The student has an opportunity to respond and the decision is based on reviewed evidence and human professional judgement. Conflicts of interest are recorded and managed.

Appeal and Dispute Resolution Procedure

1. Before making a formal appeal, individuals are encouraged to discuss the matter with the relevant Shafston personnel in an effort to reach a shared understanding of the matter and agreement.

   A stakeholder may lodge a formal appeal with the VET Manager without having to attempt informal resolution first. Where the VET Manager made the original decision, the appeal is referred directly to the PEO or an

uninvolved delegate.

2. Any stakeholder may submit a formal appeal to Shafston about a decision. Appeals information captured includes:

    - Submission date of appeal,
    - Name of appellant,
    - Nature of appeal,
    - Date of the event / activity which lead to the appeal,
    - The products and services or related organisation practices relevant,
    - A description of the appeal and relevant supporting data,
    - Any other relevant information or attachments (if applicable),
    - The requested remedy,
    - Immediate action taken (if any), and
    - The due date for a response.

    All stages of the appeals process are documented. Appeals may be lodged via various channels including in-person via Shafston personnel, via telephone and via email.

    All appeals are immediately recorded in the Shafston **Appeals Register.**

3. Shafston commences processing of appeals as soon as practicable and within five (5) business days of an appeal being made and finalises the outcome as soon as practicable.

    Appeals are coordinated by the VET Manager and assigned to a reviewer independent of the original decision. The PEO (Peter Wei) manages escalations and any conflict involving the VET Manager; matters involving the PEO are referred to a suitably independent senior person or governing body.

4. Shafston acknowledges receipt of appeals in writing immediately, as soon as practical, and:
    - Arranges a suitable time if needed to discuss the appeal,
    - Advises appellants of expected timeframes, and
    - Gives appellants the contact details of the allocated contact person they can speak to about their appeal.

    An up-to-date status is made available to the appellant upon request and at regular intervals.

5. Appeal investigations are expected to be resolved, and decisions made on the appeal as soon as practical and within twenty (20) working days of the appeal being received in writing.

    Appellants are given an opportunity to formally present their case at no cost and be accompanied and assisted by a support person at any relevant meetings.

    Decisions and outcomes of all appeals are merit-based decisions that consider all available evidence. Shafston ensures appeals are considered with an open mind and without bias arising from any past issues with the appellant.

    Issues raised in appeals are analysed to determine cause(s) and the root cause evident.

6. Appellants are advised of the outcome of the appeal in writing, including detailed reasons for the outcome. With this notification, appellants also receive information on how they can progress their appeal if still unhappy.

7. If the appellant is dissatisfied with the internal appeal outcome, they may request an independent external review. The PEO facilitates referral to an external reviewer who is genuinely independent of Shafston and the original decision-maker; the external reviewer's contact details and arrangements are advised to the appellant. Escalated appeals are to include the following information:
    - Submission date of appeal,
    - Name of appellant,
    - Nature of appeal,
    - Reasons why the appellant is not satisfied with the outcome of the original appeal, and
    - Any other relevant information or attachments (if applicable).

8. Shafston Principal Executive Officer (PEO) acknowledges receipt of escalated appeals in writing as soon as possible and within five (5) working days of receipt of the appeal.

    The PEO facilitates referral to a suitably qualified independent external reviewer, whose identity and independence are disclosed to the appellant before the review starts. Shafston must have an effective review arrangement available when requested.

    Shafston gives due consideration to any recommendations arising from the external review within ten (10) working days of the receipt of the recommendations, including implementing the decision(s) or recommendation(s) and/or taking the preventive or corrective action(s) required by the decision and advises the appellant of that action in writing.

    Shafston will seek to arrange external review promptly, noting an independent reviewer's determination may exceed Shafston's internal 20-working-day target. Any delay will be explained in writing and regular progress updates provided.

Appellants are advised on the outcome of appeals in writing, including detailed reason(s) for the outcome, explanations for decisions and remedies where appropriate.

Shafston securely maintain records of all details of the appeals process and retains evidence of all documentation relevant. Each appeal and its outcome is recorded via the **Appeals Register**. This register is located at: Staff Portal - Sharepoint

Independent external review – low-cost arrangement

Internal appeals are free. If requested after the internal determination, Shafston will arrange access to a genuinely independent external reviewer at NO or LOW COST to the appellant, as required by Outcome Standard 2.8. The appellant may be charged only a reasonable, pre-disclosed low fee; Shafston will meet any remaining review cost necessary to keep the appellant's fee low. It is not acceptable to pass on an unrestricted external reviewer invoice if doing so would make access unaffordable.

Before a referral is confirmed Shafston will advise the student in writing of the proposed reviewer, independence, scope, likely timeframe, exact maximum student fee, available payment or hardship arrangements and any support available. An appellant may ask about hardship or a fee waiver; the PEO will consider and document the request without restricting the right to review. The fee and external-review provider must be formally approved and published before this policy is issued.

The external reviewer's findings, Shafston's response, remedies and notification dates are recorded in the Appeals Register and communicated to the appellant. The 20-working-day target applies to Shafston's internal appeal; the externally controlled timeframe is communicated separately and monitored.

Appeals Processing Delays

If at any stage Shafston considers more than twenty (20) working days are required to process and finalise an appeal, Shafston:

- Informs the appellant in writing, including reasons why more time is required, and
- Regularly updates the appellant on the progress of the matter.

Shafston retains records of all appeals for a period of at least ten (10) years, allowing parties to the appeal access to these records.

Improvement Actions

Shafston is committed to take appropriate action in any case where an appeal is upheld. In cases where a appeal is upheld, Shafston endeavours to identify the root cause of the matter that was appealed and takes appropriate action to prevent the situation happening again.

All improvement actions arising from appeals are raised via an **Improvement Record.** Shafston maintains a **Continuous Improvement Register** for recording the receipt and management of improvement records.

Shafston:

- Regularly analyses appeals to identify trends and any further improvements needed,
- Audits the appeals process on an annual basis to assess its effectiveness and improve the appeals process as needed.

Please refer to the **Quality Policy** for further information on the continuous improvement process.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Shafston monitors and evaluates the appeals process to ensure appeals are handled objectively.

A process of performance monitoring, evaluation, and reporting has been established and implemented.

The organisation continually improves the effectiveness and efficiency of processes. Process performance and outcomes are regularly audited to identify and remove causes of existing and potential problems, as well as to uncover any opportunities for improvement.

Please refer to the **Quality Policy** for further information on the monitoring and evaluation process.