

Independent Complaints Review Procedure

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1. Purpose

EEI provides an independent complaints review mechanism available to all EEI member institutions. The mechanism supports compliance with TrustEd Ireland ELE Code of Practice Criteria 6.8(a) and 8.6(b) and EEI governance standards. It ensures that where internal complaints procedures do not reach resolution, complainants have access to independent review of standards compliance.

2. Scope

The mechanism is available to:

- All enrolled learners of EEI member institutions, including those who have been accepted and are yet to commence their programme (pre-arrival learners)
- All staff members employed by EEI member institutions

Where a complaint relates to a TrustEd Ireland authorised provider, the review will assess compliance against the relevant TrustEd Ireland standards. Where a complaint relates to a member that is not TrustEd authorised, the review will assess compliance against EEI's Code of Conduct, Charter, and other published quality standards.

EEI's review is limited to standards compliance. The mechanism does not adjudicate:

- Academic results
- Accommodation disputes
- Visa or immigration matters
- Employment disputes (subject to Section 10 below)
- Matters under active consideration by statutory bodies

EEI reserves the right to prioritise complaints raising substantive standards compliance issues and to decline complaints that fall outside scope, are vexatious, unsupported by evidence, or previously determined.

3. Exhaustion of Internal Procedure

EEI will only consider complaints where the member institution's internal complaints procedure has been completed and evidence of the outcome is provided. Complainants must attach written confirmation of the institution's final response.

4. Admissibility Screening

On receipt of a completed complaint form, EEI will acknowledge receipt and conduct an admissibility review to confirm that the complaint falls within scope and raises a credible allegation of potential non-compliance with relevant standards.

EEI will notify the complainant in writing of the admissibility decision, including reasons where a complaint is declined.

5. Provider Response

Where a complaint is admissible, it will be forwarded to the member institution for written response. EEI may facilitate clarification or informal resolution where appropriate.

6. Independent External Review

Where the complaint remains unresolved and a substantive standards issue persists, the matter will be referred to an Independent External Reviewer.

7. Appointment of External Reviewers

EEI maintains a panel of independent External Reviewers who are appointed on a case-by-case basis. Each reviewer must:

- Declare any conflicts of interest prior to appointment
- Operate independently of EEI management and Board

The provider must confirm in writing that they are satisfied no conflict of interest exists with the appointed reviewer.

8. External Review Process

The External Reviewer will review documentation from both parties and issue written findings on compliance with the relevant standards. The Reviewer does not award compensation or replace statutory dispute mechanisms. Findings are final within the EEI framework.

9. Learner Refunds

Failure by a provider to comply with its published refund policy, or with the specific refund obligations set out in the ILEP Arrangements and, where applicable, TrustEd Ireland standards, constitutes a standards breach. EEI can and will assess such failures as part of its review.

The key refund obligations which apply to ILEP-listed providers are set out in Sections 4(12)(a) and 5A of the ILEP Arrangements Applying to English Language Programmes (updated March 2025) and include the following:

- Providers must have a public, documented refund policy covering withdrawals prior to commencement, shortly after commencement, and during the programme.
- The maximum time from receipt of a refund request to issue of the refund must not exceed two months.
- Any administrative charges retained by the provider must be fair, proportionate, and disclosed to the student prior to purchase.
- Fees paid in advance of a visa application must be held in an escrow or ring-fenced account. If a visa is refused, the fees (less any pre-indicated handling charge) must be refunded within 20 working days of the refusal being communicated to the provider.

Where a complainant alleges that a provider has failed to comply with any of the above, EEI will treat this as a potential standards matter within scope. EEI's findings may include a determination that the provider has breached its published policy or ILEP obligations.

A separate but related ground for complaint is where a provider has a published refund policy that meets the required standards but the provider fails to apply it in practice. A complainant who can demonstrate that a provider did not follow its own stated refund procedures has a legitimate standards complaint within scope of this scheme, regardless of the commercial amount involved.

Where a provider is authorised to use the TrustEd Ireland mark, the provider is required to comply with ELE Code and QA Guidelines criteria. A provider that recruits learners enrolled on study visas/immigration permissions, is required to comply with immigration requirements. EEI will assess provider compliance with TrustEd Ireland and Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration requirements.

10. Staff Complaints

Staff complaints processed through this mechanism are assessed against EEI and TrustEd Ireland standards on workplace conduct and staff welfare. Staff complainants are also advised to consult the Workplace Relations Commission Code of Practice on Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures, which sets out principles applicable to the employment relationship.

WRC Code of Practice on Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures:

https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/what_you_should_know/codes_practice/cop3/

11. Process Timelines

The following timeframes apply from the date of receipt of a fully completed complaint form:

Stage	Action	Timeframe
Receipt	Acknowledgement of complaint to complainant	2 working days
Admissibility	EEI admissibility decision issued to complainant	10 working days
Provider response	Member institution submits written response to EEI	15 working days from notification
Resolution attempt	EEI facilitates informal resolution where appropriate	10 working days
External review referral	Matter referred to Independent External Reviewer	5 working days after failed resolution
External review findings	Written findings issued by External Reviewer	20 working days from referral

EEI will notify both parties of any unavoidable delay and the revised expected timeframe.

12. Costs

External Reviewers are appointed on a case-by-case basis. Where non-compliance is identified, the provider bears the cost of the review. Where the complaint is not upheld, EEI bears the review cost. This model will be reviewed after 12 months of operation.

13. Annual Review

This procedure will be reviewed annually to ensure proportionality, sustainability, and alignment with TrustEd Ireland and EEI governance requirements.