

Hong Kong Institute of Speech Therapists Limited	Document No.	HKIST-B-CHP-v1
	Issue Date	18/09/2017
Complaint Handling Procedures	Review Date	17/09/2020
	Page	1 of 9

# Complaint Handling Procedures

Version	Effective Date
1.0	

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Hong Kong Institute of Speech Therapists Limited	Document No.	HKIST-B-CHP-v1
	Issue Date	18/09/2017
Complaint Handling Procedures	Review Date	17/09/2020
	Page	2 of 9

## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) of the Hong Kong Institute of Speech Therapists Limited (HKIST) is established to promote ethical practice in the field of speech therapy, to manage and when necessary, to enforce the ethical framework of speech therapy in Hong Kong, so as to protect service users and the public by ensuring that quality professional speech therapy services are provided by accredited speech therapists.

1.2 Complaints could be categorized as external or internal complaints. External complaints refer to those raised by members of the public or members of the profession on individual accredited speech therapist in relation to his or her professional practice if it is believed that there has been a breach of the Council's Ethical Framework. Internal complaints refer to those complaints raised by accredited speech therapists on the operation of the organization, including appeals for reviewing results of accreditation.

1.3 Any expression of concerns or complaints over the speech therapy profession are perceived as opportunities for its improvement. This document sets out the procedures which the PIC will follow a complaint is received. These procedures reflect the policies as endorsed by the HKIST Professional Council. The workflow of complaint handling is illustrated in the flow chart in Appendix I, and the details are set out in the sections that follow.

## 2.0 Receipt of complaint

Members of the public could submit a written complaint to the HKIST using the Complaint Form (Appendix II). On receipt of the written complaint, an acknowledgement letter would be sent to the complainant within 14 working days from the date of receipt of the written complaint, and the PIC would consider whether the complaint involves a possible breach of Code of Ethics and requires further investigation.

Hong Kong Institute of Speech Therapists Limited	Document No.	HKIST-B-CHP-v1
	Issue Date	18/09/2017
Complaint Handling Procedures	Review Date	17/09/2020
	Page	3 of 9

### **3.0 Investigation**

3.1 To ensure that complaints are handled in a fair and transparent manner, the preliminary investigation will be performed by three members, including one speech therapist member of the PIC, one expert member in the field of speech therapy related to the complaint and one lay member. Before the matter is discussed at the PIC meeting, the accredited speech therapist being complained against will be informed of the complaint and be invited to give an explanation in reply. All information related to the complaint will be handled in strict confidentiality.

3.2 The written complaint received, the explanation submitted by the concerned accredited speech therapist and any other relevant information which is available will be considered during the investigation, and the decision of whether the complaint would be upheld or not will be made.

3.2.1 If the complaint is not being upheld, a brief on the complaint will be prepared for the Chairman of the PIC, who will inform the complainant and the accredited speech therapist being complained against about the outcome in writing;

3.2.2 If the complaint is being upheld, a brief on the complaint will be prepared for the Chairman of the PIC, which will include any disciplinary actions. The PIC Chairman will review the outcome and any disciplinary actions, and if in agreement, will prepare a report on the case which will be submitted to the HKIST Board for adjudication.

### **4.0 Adjudication by the HKIST Professional Council**

Upon receipt of the report on the complaint from the PIC Chairman, the HKIST Professional Council will review the outcome of the investigation and recommended disciplinary actions. Upon ratification, the accredited speech therapist being complained against will be informed of the outcome and disciplinary actions would be taken accordingly.

Hong Kong Institute of Speech Therapists Limited	Document No.	HKIST-B-CHP-v1
	Issue Date	18/09/2017
Complaint Handling Procedures	Review Date	17/09/2020
	Page	4 of 9

## 5.0 Disciplinary actions

The complaints will be categorized as minor breach, disciplinary matters or criminal offence. While timely referral to the appropriate authority would be carried out in case of criminal offense, penalties and/or required undertakings will be imposed on the accredited speech therapist being complained against depending on the nature and severity of the breach of ethical framework. Examples of penalties and required undertakings, may include but not limited to the following:

Penalties	Required undertakings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Warning letter</li> <li>- Suspension of accreditation from HKIST</li> <li>- Expulsion from the HKIST</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- completion of training related to clinical practice or management practices, etc.</li> <li>- changes to clinical or reporting practices</li> <li>- rectification of the concerned matter</li> </ul>

## 6.0 Notification of the results

It will generally take at least six months before a case can be concluded, depending on the complexity of each case. The complainants will be informed about the progress of the disciplinary proceedings as far as possible and they will be notified of the decision of the complaint within six months from the launch of investigation.

## 7.0 Appeal

If either the complainant or the individual being complained against disagree with the outcome of the investigation of the complaint, he or she may request for appeal for re-investigation of the complaint within one month after the notification of results. The re-investigation of the complaint will be conducted by a team of three members different from the original investigating team.

Hong Kong Institute of Speech Therapists Limited	Document No.	HKIST-B-CHP-v1
	Issue Date	18/09/2017
Complaint Handling Procedures	Review Date	17/09/2020
	Page	5 of 9

## **8.0 Publication of HKIST’s decision on Disciplinary Inquiries**

In order to improve the transparency of the disciplinary proceedings and to educate the public and members of the profession on what contributes a breach of ethical framework in relation to speech therapy, the HKIST’s decision on disciplinary inquiries will be published onto the HKIST website. If the accredited speech therapist is found guilty of any professional misconduct, the full judgment will be published onto the HKIST’s website for a fixed period of three years after the expiry of the one-month appeal period or after the final decision of the appeal is made. While the full identity of the guilty speech therapist will be shown, the identity of the complainant and other related parties will be edited out.

## **9.0 Complaint Register**

The PIC will maintain a complaint register to document all complaints handled and the respective disciplinary actions taken. The format of the complaint register could be referred to in Appendix III.

Hong Kong Institute of Speech Therapists Limited	Document No.	HKIST-B-CHP-v1
	Issue Date	18/09/2017
Complaint Handling Procedures	Review Date	17/09/2020
	Page	6 of 9

## Appendix I

### Workflow of Complaint Handling









