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# Complaint Handling Procedures

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## 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 members of the register of speech therapists in Hong Kong.

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 member of the register of speech therapists 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 against the HKIST, including appeals for reviewing results of registration as member of register of speech therapists.

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 when a complaint is received. These procedures reflect the policies as endorsed by the HKIST Professional Council. The workflow of internal and external complaint handling is illustrated 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 at any time using the Complaint Form (Appendix II). On receipt of the written complaint, the HKIST will send an acknowledgement letter to the complainant within 14 working days from the date of receipt of the written complaint. The PIC would then consider whether the complaint involves impartial issues against HKIST or a possible breach of Code of Ethics that requires further investigation.

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### 3.0 Investigation

3.1 To ensure that complaints are handled in a fair and transparent manner, the preliminary investigation will be performed by an investigation panel of three members, including one speech therapist member from the PIC, one expert member in the field of speech therapy related to the complaint and one lay member.

3.2 The speech therapist being complained against will be informed of the complaint and he / she will have to provide a written reply within one month upon the notification of the complaint. If necessary, the complainant, the concerned speech therapist and any other witnesses will be invited for an interview to obtain further information related to the complaint. This information collection process will be completed within three months from the receipt of the complaint. All information related to the complaint will be handled in strict confidentiality.

3.3 Within one month after all necessary information is collected, the investigation panel will call a meeting to investigate into the complaint. The written complaint received, the explanation submitted by the concerned speech therapist and any other relevant information which is available will be considered during the investigation, and the decision of whether the complaint will be upheld or not will be made.

3.4 The investigation panel will then prepare a brief with details of the complaint, findings of the investigation, recommended decisions and disciplinary actions (if any) for the Chairperson of the PIC within one month from the investigation panel meeting. The Chairperson of the PIC will review the findings of the investigation, any recommended decisions and disciplinary actions. If the complaint is not upheld, the HKIST Professional Council, the complainant and the concerned speech therapist will be informed of the decision made. If the complaint is upheld, the PIC Chairperson will prepare a report on the case which will be submitted to the HKIST Professional Council for adjudication.

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#### 4.0 Adjudication by the HKIST Professional Council

Upon receipt of the report on the complaint from the PIC Chairperson, the HKIST Professional Council will review the findings of the investigation, recommended decisions and disciplinary actions for ratification.

#### 5.0 Disciplinary actions

The complaints will be categorized as breach of professional conduct or criminal offence. While timely referral to the appropriate authority would be carried out in case of criminal offense, disciplinary actions will be imposed on the speech therapist being complained against depending on the nature and severity of the breach of ethical framework. If a speech therapist commits a crime that damage the reputation of the speech therapy profession, he or she will be removed from the register for a period that ranges from three to twelve months, depending on the crime. Examples of breach of professional ethics and disciplinary actions may include but not limited to the following:

Breach of professional ethics	Disciplinary actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dishonest behaviours that lead to breach of trust</li> <li>- Dishonest behaviours that adversely damage the reputation of speech therapists</li> <li>- Inappropriate use of personal data without consent</li> <li>- Unethical speech therapy practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Written warning</li> <li>- Written reprimand</li> <li>- Removal from the register of speech therapists</li> </ul>

#### 6.0 Notification of the results

Upon ratification, the complainant and the speech therapist being complained against will be informed of the findings and any disciplinary actions would be taken accordingly within one month. It will generally take at least nine months and up to one year before a case can be concluded, depending on the

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complexity of each case. The complainants and the concerned speech therapist will be informed about the progress of the investigation and/or disciplinary proceedings as far as possible.

## **7.0 Appeal**

If either the complainant or the speech therapist being complained against disagree with the outcome of the investigation of the complaint, he or she may submit a written request for appeal for re-investigation of the complaint within two weeks after the notification of results. The re-investigation of the complaint will be conducted by the Appeal Panel, which will consist of three members different from the original investigation panel. The Appeal Panel will re-investigate the complaint and report their findings and recommendations to the PIC Chairperson within one month after the appeal request was received. The PIC Chairperson will then review the findings submitted by the Appeal Panel, and prepare a report on the complaint with recommendations to the HKIST Professional Council for adjudication. The complainant and the speech therapist being complained against will be notified on the appeal results within one month from the ratification by the HKIST Professional Council.

## **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 will violate the ethical framework of speech therapy, the HKIST’s decision on disciplinary inquiries will be published onto the HKIST website. If the concerned speech therapist is confirmed to have committed any professional misconduct, the full judgment will be published onto the HKIST’s website for a fixed period of one year after the expiry of the two-week appeal period or after the final decision of the appeal is made. While the full Chinese and English names of the speech therapist will be shown, the identity of the complainant and other related parties will be edited out.

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## **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.

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## Appendix I

### Workflow of Complaint Handling







