

INITIAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Introduction to the assessment process

1. The 'Quick Assessment' (QA) process is a tool that is often used within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to determine the facts relating to an incident, to help a supervisor decide if further action or investigation is warranted and to provide a record for any possible future inquiry. The primary principle underpinning the ADF QA process is that any incident should be resolved as soon as practicable after it occurs, to the satisfaction of all parties involved and before any need for it to be escalated up the chain of command.

2. In some workplace situations that involve minor complaints, little will be gained by conducting a formal or drawn-out inquiry. For example, some complaints can result from misunderstandings or ignorance. Accordingly, extensive and time-consuming fact-finding inquiries may not help resolve, and in some case may unnecessarily inflame, the issue. Therefore, the ADF QA process and report within the ADF has been modified and developed to form the Australian Air Force Cadets (AAFC) Initial Assessment process, which is primarily based on the completion of the Initial Assessment Report (IAR) at attachment 1. AAFC unit commanders are required to follow this process to determine if an unacceptable behaviour incident or complaint within the unit can be resolved immediately or whether a more formal inquiry is warranted. Regardless of whether the incident can be readily resolved or not, the unit commander is required to advise any complainant and respondent of his decision on the way forward.

3. Where there are allegations or incidents of unacceptable behaviour, the selection of an appropriate person to conduct an initial assessment is critical to a successful outcome. If the unit commander chooses not to conduct the assessment himself then a mature, responsible and well-respected member of the unit should be selected. If the unit commander is not qualified to conduct and assessment because he is subject of the complaint, the next senior officer in the chain of command (or his delegate) is to make the assessment. In order to minimise any conflict of interest, unit commanders who conduct an initial assessment should not conduct any subsequent reviews of the case.

4. The completed IAR should ultimately provide the unit commander with enough information to help him determine the most appropriate way ahead to resolve the particular incident or complaint. Options available for internally resolving complaints include either self-resolution, one of the several alternative dispute resolution techniques (including mediation and workplace conferencing) or independent professional counselling. Any of these options can be sought through the chain of command.

Purpose of an initial assessment

5. The purpose of an initial assessment is to:
- a. collect relevant information to help determine the nature and seriousness of the complaint;
 - b. allow the unit commander to decide if and what further action is required; and,

- c. provide the AAFC organisation and commanders with a transparent and accountable record of the initial details of the incident and the reasons underpinning any action taken with respect to that incident.

When an assessment should be conducted

6. An assessment should be conducted as soon as reasonably practicable after an incident has been observed, occurred or reported. Whenever possible, an assessment should be conducted within 7 days of a complaint being made or an incident being observed or reported.

How to conduct an assessment

7. The member conducting the assessment is to:
 - a. establish whether an incident has occurred and collect sufficient relevant information to decide if further action needs to be taken;
 - b. complete an IAR;
 - c. avoid taking formal statements from witnesses; however, notes of interviews are to be retained (telephone interviews are permissible);
 - d. notify relevant individuals that they may make written statements if they so desire;
 - e. determine who else is aware of the allegation or incident (this may be important for the privacy and protection of persons involved in the incident and for determining whether any action may be required in respect of other members);
 - f. where appropriate, establish the outcome(s) sought by a complainant or affected member(s);
 - g. ensure all relevant notes and other records are attached to the IAR and are stored and distributed in accordance with privacy requirements; and,
 - h. recommend or decide on what options are should be taken to resolve the complaint or deal with the incident.

8. Where an initial assessment indicates that an offence may have been committed, the unit commander is to notify parents if applicable and refer the matter to the Service or civilian police for further action as soon as possible.

Making decisions based on IARs

9. The unit commander is required to consider the information in the IAR to make a decision on the best method to resolve the issue. However, he is not obliged to implement the reporting officer's recommendations. All notes taken, documents obtained and records of telephone conversations are to be attached to the report.

10. The unit commander may to decide (but is not limited) to:

- a. refer the matter immediately to parents (if minors/cadets are involved) and civil police if the matter is suspected of being a criminal offence,
- b. refer the matter to superior authority,
- c. take no further action,
- d. resolve the matter within the unit,
- e. resolve the matter by using alternative dispute resolution techniques, and/or
- f. report the matter to an external expert agency for advice/resolution.

11. In all cases, the unit commander is to record the decision(s) taken in the relevant section in the IAR, together with a short summary of the reasons for the decision(s).

Retention of IARs

12. IARs are to be retained on the appropriate unit file as they may be required in any later external review of the matter. This file is to be labelled with appropriate privacy markings and held by the Unit Commander for a period of seven years.

Attachment:

- A. Incident/complaint initial assessment report