



Complaint Handling Guidance

This guidance is for training providers and grant recipients who are dealing with issues, feedback and complaints from service users and members of the public as part of their role. The aim is to set out best practice on dealing with both informal and formal complaints, and how to understand what constitutes a complaint.

Step 1: How to recognise a complaint

It is important to be able to recognise when a complaint is being made and to deal with it appropriately. Sometimes someone will simply be raising queries, however these queries can become concerns and they may be expressing their dissatisfaction about something. It is important that you can identify when these queries have become concerns that need to be addressed more formally.

People may also feel intimidated or concerned that making a complaint may affect them negatively. Or they may have special needs or requirements, which need accommodating in order to make your complaints process fair and accessible. It is important that you can identify when this is happening and to act on it appropriately. If in doubt about whether a complaint is being raised – ask! Speak to the person, acknowledge their concerns, and ask them if they would like them to be addressed under your complaints procedure.

Informal complaints can be expressed as feedback, off the cuff remarks or within informal conversations and emails. Whereas formal complaints will generally be obvious as the complainant will tell you they are making a complaint and ask for a response and/or resolution. If you are unsure whether it is feedback or similar (an informal complaint) or a formal complaint, it is best to check with the individual. This can be done by asking if they would like a conversation about the matter or whether they would like to follow the complaints process, sending them your policy, and deal with the matter more formally. This shows you are taking what they are saying seriously.

Dealing with informal complaints, issues and feedback swiftly and empathetically can prevent escalation into a formal complaint.

If you receive a formal complaint, getting the investigation right first time helps you reach the right outcome in the right way without escalation to a Stage 2 level complaint. It can also help you identify any learning as quickly as possible.



Step 2: Responding to the initial complaint

Most people when making a complaint want:

- **An opportunity to be heard and to input into the process before decisions are made.** A key part of your process needs to be really understanding the complaint that is being made. This will help to approach the complaint in the best way possible to reach a resolution. If you do not get to the heart of the complaint being raised, you will not be able to fully resolve it. We sometimes receive complaint letters which are very long and detailed and it can be difficult to identify the key issues being raised. If you receive a complaint like this, it can be useful to phone the complainant and talk it through, identify with them what the real issues are and **what is important to them**.

Once you have a good understanding of the key issues, you can start to address them.

- **For their issues/complaint to be dealt with swiftly.**
- **To see how decisions are made by following a clear, understandable, and transparent process.**
- **Those dealing with their complaint to be sensitive and impartial and make decisions based on objective information and appropriate criteria.**

Make sure you:

- Listen carefully. Confirm the complainant's concerns and the issues to be investigated.
- Ask the complainant what they want to achieve. Can it be resolved straight away?
- Manage expectations and explain what is possible and the timescales for responses and ensure you are following the process and timescales within your complaints policy.
- Share your complaints policy with the complainant. More details of complaint handling and model policies can be found here: [Complaints Bikeability](#).
- Agree how to keep the complainant updated and involved, and how often.
- Explain what will happen next.



Step 3: Sharing your investigation plan

Be clear and transparent throughout your investigation and explain the investigation process at the start. This should include:

- That implied consent is presumed to share complainants name and complaint details as and where necessary to conduct the investigation.
- What evidence you will consider.
- Who you will speak to.
- Who will give advice/independent opinion.
- How you will decide if the care or service provided was right or not.
- Who will be involved in decision-making.

Throughout the investigation remember to:

- Make sure you meet the requirements of any regulations and local policies and procedures.
- Keep accurate records. Your complaint file should be well structured and contain all the evidence you have considered to reach your decision. This will be key if the complaint is escalated to a stage two complaint and your response and evidence will need to be investigated by The Trust. It should include:
 - all complaint correspondence
 - notes of relevant telephone conversations and meetings
 - any relevant internal and external emails
 - any statements taken from staff or witnesses
 - documentation about any action you have taken as a result of the complaint

Step 4: Making and sharing your decision

- When responding to the complaint, you should include as much detail as possible to clearly communicate the conclusion of the investigation and how this was reached.
- **Avoid jargon, legalistic, emotive, or provocative language** as this can be a barrier to resolving issues. It is best practice to use clear, comprehensible language



and a neutral tone. Clarity in any communication is vital, therefore complex and legalistic terminology is best avoided when writing responses to complaints. It is also important to give careful thought to the tone used in your complaint responses and avoid dismissive or defensive language. It can be helpful to have someone else read your draft complaint before sharing it with the complainant to ensure it is clear, easily understood and the tone of the response will not unintentionally create a negative response.

- It can be useful to bullet point the complaint areas and respond to each point, providing evidence wherever possible.
- Before you send your final response to the complainant, make sure it is as good a response as you would like to receive yourself.

Your response should:

Be clear and compassionate

- Clearly set out the issues the complainant raised and what they want to achieve by complaining.
- Use language that is empathetic, and that the complainant can understand.
- Acknowledge any distress or upset caused to complainant.

Provide evidence

- Set out how you have investigated the complaint and what evidence you considered, for example interviews with relevant staff, instructors, school and/or witnesses.

Complaint Outcomes

If the complaint is upheld

It is important to be honest. If the complaint is upheld be clear about this and explain what will be done as a result. Remember an early apology can go a long way to resolving issues.

When offering an apology, where you have concluded that the service was unreasonable, really listen to what the customer is saying and construct your apology based upon what they say they are unhappy with.

A well-meaning apology will:

- Recognise poor service or recognise the complainant's dissatisfaction.
- Take responsibility where appropriate.



- Provide reasons for service failings.
- Offer regret for a service that has fallen below the expected standard.
- Offer redress where appropriate.
- Acknowledge what went wrong and offer the complainant a suitable remedy, along with a full explanation of what happened. The remedy should be proportionate to the level of poor service.

Set out:

- What happened, with reference to the evidence.
- What should have happened, quoting relevant standards, Cycle Training Delivery Guide guidance and internal policies as appropriate, and if they were met.
- If there is a difference between what happened and what should have happened, explain what this is and the impact it has had.

Be clear about your decision and any action you will take

Give your view about the service provided and clear reasons for each of your decisions.

If you found something went wrong, include:

- A suitable apology.
- An offer to put things right.
- Explanations of what lessons have been learnt.
- Details of how the organisation will put matters right for other service users to prevent this occurring again.

If the complaint is not upheld or partly upheld

Set out clearly and concisely why the complaint has not been upheld and state the evidence which has led to this outcome for each point raised in the complaint.

It may be that parts of the complaint are upheld, and other parts not upheld. In this instance you must set out the response clearly showing which parts of the complaint have or have not been upheld and follow the above processes for each.

As in the previous section on responding when a complaint is upheld, it is still key to make sure you explain about any actions that you will take following the complaint. It can be that a complaint is not upheld but there are still learning points to be taken from it and changes to communication



or a process that can help prevent future complaints/issues arising. These can be communicated to the complainant in the complaint response.

Step 5: Learning from complaints

Complaints can offer good insight into future improvements you can make to your service. Take the time to reflect on:

- Why the complaint arose.
- Whether there are any gaps in your processes and procedures that could be addressed to help prevent future complaints.

You should also encourage a culture of open reflection in which your team can identify where things have gone wrong, whether or not a complaint has been made. It is also important to celebrate and learn from each other's successes.

You should review within your complaints log what you could do differently – either to prevent something escalating into a complaint and/or to handle the complaint differently. You might identify improvements that could be made to:

- Processes
- Communication
- Knowledge

Share the lessons learned more widely in the business.

A good complaints log is more than just a list of complaints with brief descriptions and dates. It should contain information on:

- What went wrong
- The actions taken
- Any improvements to processes

Good complaint handling is not limited to providing an individual remedy to the complainant. You should ensure that all feedback and lessons learnt from complaints contribute to service improvement.



The
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Learning from complaints is a powerful way of continuously reviewing and improving services, enhancing the reputation of an organisation, and increasing trust among the people who use its services.