

Complaints Policy

Introduction

This document sets out our complaints policy and procedure and is aimed at our centres, learners and all interested parties who encounter a direct or indirect service from ABE.

We value all the centres delivering our qualifications and the learners who undertake them and our aim every day is to exceed the expectations of our customers.

We are confident of providing a high-quality service and would be extremely disappointed if this is not the case.

Therefore, it is important should you feel you have encountered a level of service that is below both yours and our expectations that you raise any concerns you may have with us immediately so that we may address them and learn lessons.

Scope

This policy covers complaints learners, members of the public or centres may wish to make in relation to the qualifications and associated services offered by ABE.

The process described here should not be used to cover appeals in relation to academic decisions made by ABE. These areas are covered by our Appeals Policy. Should a complaint be submitted which is in fact an enquiry or an appeal we will respond to inform the relevant party that the issue is being considered, where appropriate, in accordance with the approach outlined in our Customer Service Statement or Appeals Policy. Learners may use the Complaints process covered by this Policy if they are dissatisfied with the outcomes of their Appeal or Enquiry.

Similarly, if you are unhappy about the way an examination or assessment was delivered and conducted and you suspect malpractice or maladministration may have occurred, you should send your concern to us in accordance with the arrangements in our Malpractice Policy.

Concerned individuals may also contact ABE using this Policy in the event of a perceived breach of ABE's Code of Conduct.

Centre's responsibility

Centres should take all responsible steps to ensure that their staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of our qualifications, and your learners, are aware of the contents of this policy and that your centre has a complaints handling procedure and appeals process in place to deal with complaints from learners about the services they provide from your centre. If an individual is unhappy about a service or activity being delivered by a centre, they must first go through the centre's complaints process before bringing the matter to ABE.

Review arrangements

We will review the policy and its associated procedures annually as part of our self-evaluation arrangements and revise it as and when necessary, in response to customer, learner, or regulatory feedback (e.g. to align with any appeals and complaints process established by the regulators) and any trends that may emerge in the subject matter of complaints received.

If you would like to feedback any views, please contact us via the details provided at below.

How should I complain?

All ABE staff have been trained to help our customers and they all like to help, so you should first try to sort out any problem at the earliest opportunity by speaking to the person who dealt with you. Alternatively, centres can raise and/or submit a compliant form found on the ABE portal.

If they cannot help or you wish to speak to someone else, you can ask to speak to the manager in charge.

If this is not possible, or if you are not satisfied with the help provided by the manager, please send a written complaint, normally within one month of the event you are complaining about and address it to us at the contact details outlined at the end of Policy.

Learners and/or members of the public who wish to complain about a level of service provided by the centre at which they have taken an ABE qualification should have exhausted their centre's own complaints process before bringing the complaint to us. However, learners can make the complaint directly to us in exceptional circumstances where they feel there was a significant breach by the centre of our various procedures (contact details are contained at the end of this Policy).

If I complain, what details do I have to give?

When you contact us, please give us your full name, contact details including a daytime telephone number along with:

- a full description of your complaint (including the subject matter and dates and times if known);
- any names of the people you have dealt with so far;
- copies of any papers or letters to do with the complaint.

Sometimes a complainant will wish to remain anonymous. However, it is always preferable to reveal your identity and contact details to us, and if you are concerned about possible adverse consequences, please inform us that you do not wish for us to divulge your identity.

While we are prepared to investigate issues which are reported to us anonymously, we shall always try to confirm an allegation by means of a separate investigation before taking up the matter with those the complaint/allegation relates.

Complaints brought to our attention by the Regulators

Where the regulators notify us about failures that have been discovered in the assessment process or other activities of another awarding organisation, these will be reviewed in the same manner as other external complaints in accordance with the procedures below to ascertain if the same issue could affect ABE qualifications.

What will happen to my complaint?

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 48 hours, letting you know who is investigating your complaint. Our Compliance & Risk Manager (C&RM), reporting to the Responsible Officer (RO), will be responsible for ensuring the investigation is carried out in a prompt and effective manner and in accordance with the procedures in this Policy and will allocate a relevant member of staff to lead the investigation and establish whether issues relating to the complaint have occurred.

At all times we will ensure that ABE personnel assigned to the investigation have the appropriate level of training and competence and they have had no previous involvement or personal interest in the matter. If the C&RM has an involvement in the substance of the complaint, they will not be responsible for allocating a member of staff to carry out the investigation or for overseeing and managing the investigation. This action will be undertaken by the RO.

We aim to investigate the complaint within 5 working days. If your complaint is more complex or involves people who are not available at the time, we may extend this to 10 working days. We may contact you within this period to seek further information or clarification (in some instances we may recommend a meeting). At the end of the investigation we shall write/email to inform you of our decision.

Successful complaints and/or issues brought to our attention by Ofqual

If any part of your complaint is upheld, we will of course respond to the complainant accordingly and give due consideration to how we can improve our service and arrangements. For example, by reviewing our procedures to assess the impact on our qualification development, delivery or awarding arrangements and assessment process (if relevant) or arranging for staff training. In extreme circumstances, internal disciplinary procedures may be exercised where the performance or behavior of our staff is deemed in appropriate.

In situations where a complaint has been successful, or where an investigation following notification from the regulators indicates a failure in our processes, we will give due consideration to the outcome and will take appropriate actions such as:

- identify any other learner and/or centre who has been affected by that failure,
- correct, or where it cannot be corrected, mitigate as far as possible the effect of the failure, and
- review and amend our arrangements, where appropriate, to reduce the likelihood that the failure will reoccur in the future.
- start internal disciplinary procedures against a member of our staff if we found their behaviour was not appropriate in accordance with our internal procedures and arrangements.

What if I am not happy with the reply?

If you disagree with the decision the first point of call is the ABE Responsible Officer.

If you are still unhappy with the decision taken by ABE in reviewing the complaint you can, where relevant, take the matter through our Appeal arrangements which are outlined in our Appeals Policy. If after you have exhausted our Appeals arrangements and you are still unsatisfied with the outcomes, you can complain/Appeal directly to the relevant regulatory authority for the qualification (e.g. Ofqual in England).

Contact Us

If you have any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact the Compliance & Risk Manager on +44 (0)20 8329 2940 or email them at complaints@abeuk.com.