

Complaints Policy

1 General

- 1.1 This Complaints Policy sets out the Skills and Education Group Access¹ approach to handling complaints.
- 1.2 As an Access Validating Agency delivering Access to Higher Education Diplomas, we are committed to providing a quality service. To do this, we will listen and respond to the views of our customers.
- 1.3 Complaints, comments and any other expressions of dissatisfaction are taken seriously and are dealt with promptly and appropriately. We aim to learn from feedback and to improve the quality of service we offer.
- 1.4 All customer complaints received are recorded. Some will be dealt with informally over the telephone others will require a more formal investigation.

2 Scope of Complaints

- 2.1 We will consider complaints regarding our regulated functions and any other service we may provide to stakeholders. This may include but is not limited to the following:

- the behaviours of either our staff or sub-contractors
- services that would include failure to act or unreasonable delay.

- 2.2 Complaints about

- external moderation decisions
- actions taken because of confirmed malpractice/maladministration
- refusal to grant Special Arrangements.

are dealt with under our Enquiries and Appeals Policy.²

- 2.3 Where a complaint is about an Access to HE provider and its provision or assessment decisions, complainants must first go through the provider's complaints or appeals procedure prior to contacting us. As part of our contractual arrangements with providers, they all must operate a complaint handling and appeals process for students.

¹ Skills and Education Group Access is a QAA-licensed Access Validating Agency and part of the Skills and Education Group.

² Enquiries and Appeals Policy

- 2.4 Complaints from students / whistle blowers about the service provided by our providers which allege malpractice or maladministration will be covered under our Malpractice and Maladministration Policy³ .

3 How to Complain

- 3.1 Complaints should be made within one month of the occurrence or within two weeks of the unsatisfactory outcome of a complaint to a provider.
- 3.2 Where possible we would like to deal with your complaint informally and may do so over the telephone. In such cases we will confirm in an email the action we will take.
- 3.3 Sometimes a more formal approach is required and in these cases your complaint should be put in writing, giving the reason for your complaint and your expectations of the outcome as succinctly as possible, directly to accessstohe@skillsedugroup.org.uk.
- 3.4 Please include within the complaint a brief description of the actions you believe Skills and Education Group Access should take in order to remedy the issue(s) that led to the complaint. If you do not include this, Skills and Education Group Access may ask the complainant what, in their opinion, would resolve the complaint.
- 3.5 Please do not submit any additional supporting documentation until requested to do so.

4 Processing your Complaint

- 4.1 Your complaint will be logged as soon as it is received and passed to the appropriate Team for action.
- 4.2 An acknowledgement will be made within five working days of receipt of any written complaint.
- 4.3 If the complaint is excessively long or complex, we may ask you to provide a summary so that we are clear what the issues are.
- 4.4 If the complaint is from a student, we will ask for a 'Completion of Procedures' letter from the Provider with which the student is registered. Where the student is unable to provide a Completion of Procedures letter, we will contact the Provider's Head of Quality to verify that the Centre's processes have been exhausted. Once we have verified that the Provider's processes have been exhausted by the student, we will ask for details of

³ Malpractice and Maladministration

their complaints procedure and further details regarding the handling of the complaint by the Provider.

- 4.5 We will endeavour to complete any complaints investigation within one month of the initial written complaint. Complainants will be kept informed during this period and will be informed of the outcome.
- 4.5.1 If your complaint is upheld, we will, subject to the requirements of confidentiality, advise you of the actions we propose to take.
- 4.5.2 If your complaint is not upheld, we will explain why.
- 4.6. We will ensure that the person(s) at Skills and Education Group Access charged with dealing with your complaint has appropriate authority, was not involved in the incident that is subject of the complaint and has no vested interest in the outcome of the complaint.
- 4.7 If you are not happy with the way your complaint has been handled or the outcome of our investigation you can refer your grievance to the Chief Operating Officer.

In such cases

- this must be done within 10 working days of receipt of our decision;
- only the original complaint and your dissatisfaction with how it was handled will be reviewed;
- further consideration of your complaint will only be made if the review considers the complaint was not handled according to our procedures or failed to take account of some critical evidence;
- any decisions made at this stage will be signed off by the Chief Executive, will be final and the complaint closed.

5 Vexatious and Persistent Correspondence

- 5.1 We offer a transparent complaints procedure and will keep complainants informed throughout any investigation. However, complainants must allow sufficient time to carry out a thorough investigation.
- 5.2 We will not engage with abusive or persistent correspondence from complainants once a decision has been reached.
- 5.3 Repeated contact with no new evidence and /or abusive correspondence from a complainant will be considered as vexatious correspondence.
- 5.4 Where correspondence and /or behaviour are deemed to be vexatious, we will refer the complainant to this policy, explaining that if the communication continues in this manner all correspondence will cease.

5.5 Customers who remain dissatisfied with an outcome of a complaint may take their complaint to the Regulator.⁴

6 Quality Assurance

6.1 This policy and guidance is reviewed biennially to ensure it continues to meet the needs of our customers and the Regulators.

⁴ QAA – the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education