

TAA COMPLAINT POLICY

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The TAA complaint policy safeguards the rights of individuals using, providing, or who are impacted by (the “Individuals”) The Advocacy Academy’s services and ensures we improve services by learning from our errors and successes.

It looks at making a complaint, the complaint stages (informal complaints, formal complaints, and appeals), in what circumstances we might suspend or not apply this policy, and related policies.

The Advocacy Academy (TAA) welcomes feedback on any aspect of our work, including complaints, compliments, and suggestions. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with our services and a request for us to change things. Comments and compliments can be as valuable as complaints in highlighting areas for improvement or extending excellence in our work provision.

DEFINITIONS

Compliments: A compliment is a polite expression of praise or admiration for something. They are valuable, welcome, and important, and when they are received, either verbally or in writing, they will be recorded. Compliments enable The Advocacy Academy (“TAA”) to:

- understand that our service is being provided to the individuals’ satisfaction.
- provide positive feedback to our staff.
- influence our organisational and service development.
- inform our quality assurance programme.

Comments: It is always helpful to hear what people think about us and our work. People are always encouraged when they are complimented on their work. If a positive comment is received about any aspect of the organisation, it should be shared with all those involved. Comments are welcome because they can:

- help influence the policy decisions of the organisation.
- help maintain the standards of our work.
- raise issues of real importance and can lead to change for the better.

Complaints: TAA recognises that there will be times when our trustees, staff, and volunteers make mistakes or get things wrong. To learn from such mistakes, we need to know about them and encourage people to comment or complain. Such comments or complaints will always be taken seriously, recorded, and responded to. Complaints can relate to:

- The quality or nature of the service provided.
- The conduct of the staff, volunteer, or trustee
- Administration within the organisation
- Discrimination
- Provision of accurate information
- Failure to provide information.
- Unreasonable delays

- Policy of the organisation

PRINCIPLES

- **Accessibility:** This means that individuals should be encouraged to know where to go and whom to ask for further support or guidance. Information comes in a variety of ways. For example, some individuals may prefer to use voice notes or written procedures. We want to make sure that our policy caters to the different ways of making information accessible.
- **Understanding of the process:** It is important that the board members, staff, volunteers, and contractors are conversant with the policy and confidentiality of the process, and it is also made visible on the TAA website.
- **Should provide prompt and considered response:** It is important that the individuals know what they say is taken seriously and that the organisation has listened to them. Replies should be prompt, and the complainant should be clear on the timescale and response pattern.
- **Focus on problem-solving: Staff members and volunteers can often immediately resolve some complaints.** Sometimes these complaints are presented as comments. If everyone concerned knows there is a simple procedure and follows it, an escalation of the problem into a major complaint can be avoided. The objective is not to apportion blame but to resolve the problem, not to find fault but to ensure individuals feel heard and well-supported.
- **Confidentiality:** All those involved in processing the complaint - board members, staff, and volunteers should ensure that the complaint is treated with confidence.

POLICY

TAA aims to provide a high-quality service. We are committed to achieving our goals, the people we work with, and to working with the community and other organisations to achieve this. Our handling of complaints and comments forms an important part of this approach. TAA seek to:

- treat anyone making a complaint, comment, or compliment with respect.
- support anyone wishing to make a complaint to do so, keeping them informed of the process at all stages.
- deal with all complaints as swiftly as possible and maintain confidentiality as far as possible.
- ask all our staff to read and use this policy.
- encourage the relevant individuals to try to resolve complaints locally and informally, in discussion with the person making the complaint.
- treat fairly staff about whom a complaint is made.
- review the effectiveness of our policy, and monitor the level and nature of complaints, comments and compliments at regular intervals and maintain a policy proportionate to the size of the TAA.

We want our complaints policy to be effective. We will monitor and review complaint information to make sure that the correct procedure has been followed.

All complaints will be logged and monitored through a central register held by us at The Advocacy Academy. The Advocacy Board of Trustees retains oversight of complaints as part of the charity's governance. They will make sure we are learning from complaints and making any necessary changes to the way we work.

This policy may be reviewed at any time where required, but it will automatically be reviewed every three years or sooner in response to new guidance or legislation.

PROCEDURE

Making a complaint

When appropriate, the relevant Individual is made aware of this policy. A complaint should be made as soon as possible – and no more than three months – after an incident has occurred. We may extend this time limit if:

- the complaint could not reasonably have been made earlier, and
- we can still investigate the facts.

There will be three stages to the procedure:

1. Informal or problem-solving stage
2. The formal stage
3. The appeal stage

It should be made clear to all concerned that the purpose of the complaint's procedure is to solve problems and come to an agreement as quickly as possible and every effort should be made to ensure that this happens.

Throughout the whole procedure the complainant will have the right to be accompanied by a friend.

Please note that a complaint made via a social platform will not be responded to via an open platform. It will be escalated via the complaints process.

Stage 1: Informal

Most of the time a concern can be remedied by informal discussions with the people involved. This is the approach we encourage as a first step, as in the great majority of cases, matters can then be resolved in a prompt and straightforward manner. For the informal stage, we will follow these steps:

1. Wherever possible, complaints will be resolved swiftly and informally by the relevant manager. If the manager is involved in the complaint, we will ask another independent manager.
2. Where a safeguarding concern is raised via a complaint process, The Advocacy Academy Safe-guarding Framework will be followed. Our Safeguarding Officer will talk about this with you if your complaint involves a safeguarding issue.
3. It is our aim that all Stage 1 'local resolution' complaints will be resolved 14 working days after we receive the complaint. If we are unable to resolve the complaint in this timeframe, we will tell you as quickly as possible and let you know when you can expect to hear from us.

Overall, our Stage 1 emphasises the importance of resolving concerns informally whenever possible, with a commitment to swift resolution.

Stage 2: Formal stage

If you have a complaint that has not been resolved informally, you can submit a formal complaint. In this stage, we will manage and resolve your complaint as follows:

emailing us at complaints@theadvocacyacademy.com , or
writing to us at: Complaints, Operations Department, The Advocacy Academy, 5-7 Vining Street,
London, SW9 8QA.

Please include your name, email and/or postal address, and contact telephone number so that we can get back in touch with you easily.

Once the complaint is received, we will send an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receiving your complaint.

A relevant independent staff member or team separate from those involved in the informal stage will be assigned to manage the complaint to ensure the fairness of the process and aim to send a written reply within 28 days unless we have communicated another timescale to you.

Our reply will describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken because of the complaint.

The response will come in the same form of communication that the complainant used, such as an email or letter.

Stage 3: Appeals

If you are not satisfied with the result of stage 2, you can appeal in writing within 28 days of receiving the stage 2 response, explaining why you are dissatisfied with the result.

An appeals panel will be formed, comprising a senior person, a member of the complaint (operations) team, and an independent person from an unrelated part of the business. In very exceptional circumstances, an external person may be invited to be part of the panel; this decision will be made if required.

The panel will review all the information available and undertake any extra investigation they deem necessary, which may include talking to the complainant. The panel may recommend mediation if members believe this will help resolve the dispute. The Complaint team will write to you within 10 days of the panel meeting, outlining its findings and final decision.

SUSPENSION/NON-APPLICATION OF PROCEDURE

A complaint will not be considered, or further considered, through this procedure where in relation to the substance of the complaint:

- It has been withdrawn by the complainant, unless The Advocacy decides that there is merit in pursuing the complaint, e.g., to identify any lessons learnt.
- It repeats a complaint that has previously been considered through the complaint's procedure.
- It is being or has been investigated by an independent body.
- Following a request for clarification from TAA it remains unclear.
- There is reason to believe that the use of the complaint's procedure may be damaging to the interests/wellbeing of an Individual.
- The Advocacy does not have the powers to grant the outcome the complainant is seeking (in these cases the complainant will be directed to the organisations/agencies who are able to make the relevant determination);
- The complainant is vexatious and/or frivolous in that they have persistently made or continued to pursue a complaint which after investigation is found to have no substantive basis and/or there is reason to believe such complaint has not been made in good faith/is a part of campaign of harassment against individual workers. In determining whether a complaint is vexatious, the complaint(s) and responses should be reviewed by the complaints team to ensure that all issues have been addressed.

- Where the subject of complaint relates to events more than one year before the date the charity receives the complaint; the complainant has stated in writing that he is taking or intends to take proceedings to court or tribunal.
- The Advocacy Academy (TAA) has been notified that any person is investigating in contemplation of criminal proceedings; or TAA has been notified that criminal proceedings are pending.
- The Complaints Team and the Operations Director will determine any complaint which should be subject to suspension/disapplication of process for one of these reasons and the complainant (and relevant partners, where appropriate) will be informed.

CONFIDENTIALITY, GDPR AND DATA PROTECTION

Recording and Monitoring Complaints

We will only tell those people involved in resolving your complaint about it. Sometimes we may need to share your complaint or concerns with other individuals to understand the situation fully. If you are young person making a complaint, we will talk with you about any concerns we have for your wellbeing that might make it necessary to tell any other adults.

All complaints will be recorded and kept on file, including those which were resolved without being put in writing. All complaints shall be subject to the usual rules of confidentiality. We will make a report once a year to the Trustees summarising the nature of any complaints received and how they were resolved.

Ensuring the Effectiveness of the Procedure

All Trustees will receive a copy of the complaint's procedure. Existing and new staff members and volunteers will be introduced to the complaints, as part of their onboarding. The procedure will be reviewed annually, and amendments should be proposed and agreed by the Trustees.