

Complaints policy and procedure

Introduction

We value the centre delivering our regulated qualifications/units or courses 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 your and our expectations that you raise any concerns you may have with us immediately so that we may address them and learn from our mistakes.

Scope

The complaints policy and procedure is aimed at our centre, learners and all interested parties who encounter a direct or indirect service from Next Steps Ed CIC. It is not to be used to cover appeals in relation to decisions made by Next Steps Ed CIC. This is 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 in accordance with our Appeals policy. If you are unhappy about the way a course or examination was delivered and conducted and/or you suspect malpractice may have occurred you should send your concern to us in accordance with the arrangements in our Malpractice and Maladministration Policy.

Centre's responsibility

We expect that both our staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of our regulated qualifications or units or courses, and your learners, are aware of the contents of the policy and that your Centre has a complaints handling procedure and appeals process in place to deal with complaints from learners about the services provided by your Centre.

Review arrangements

We will review this 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 feed back any views please contact us via the details provided at the end of the policy.

How should I complain?

Centres:

All our 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, for example, the course tutor. If they cannot help or you wish to speak to someone else, you can ask to speak to their manager. 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 to the Quality Manager via one of the following options:

Call:

E-mail:

Write to: Next Steps Ed CIC, Castle Heights, Maid Marian Way, Nottingham, NG1 6BJ

Learners:

Learners and/or interested parties who wish to complain about a level of service provided by Next Steps Ed CIC at which they have taken a qualification offered by us should have exhausted their centre's own complaints process before bringing the complaint to us. However, learners can make the complaint directly to Next Steps Ed CIC in the following exceptional circumstances:

- A significant breach by the Centre of their own procedures.
- Communications have broken down between the learner and the Centre.

Responsibility for the investigation

All complaints will be passed to the Quality Manager who will acknowledge receipt, as appropriate and will advise the Operations Director of the complaint. The Quality Manager will be responsible for ensuring the investigation of the complaint 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 review any supporting evidence received or gathered by Next Steps Ed CIC. As part of the allocation of the investigation the Quality Manager will ensure that those involved in deciding the outcome of the complaint are not involved in the incident or do not have a vested interest in the outcome.

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.

Procedures for Handling Complaints About Staff

All complaints about staff will be taken seriously and handled promptly and fairly. Complaints should be submitted in writing to the Headteacher or a designated senior leader, outlining the nature of the allegation. A thorough investigation will be conducted, which may involve speaking with the staff member concerned, the complainant, and any relevant witnesses. If required, the school may involve external advisors or safeguarding agencies. Outcomes will be communicated to the complainant, ensuring confidentiality and appropriate support for all parties involved.

Procedures for Handling Complaints About Management

Complaints about management, including senior leadership, should be directed in writing to the Governors. The Chair will review the complaint and determine the appropriate course of action, including initiating an investigation or appointing an external investigator if necessary. Clear communication will be maintained with the complainant throughout the process, and the findings and outcomes will be shared while respecting confidentiality.

Procedures for Handling Complaints About Students

Complaints regarding the behaviour or actions of students should be submitted to the Headteacher or the designated safeguarding lead. An investigation will be carried out in line with the school's behaviour and safeguarding policies. This may involve interviewing the student(s) involved, consulting with parents/carers, and gathering evidence from staff or other students. Appropriate action will be taken based on the findings, ensuring fairness and that any safeguarding concerns are addressed.

Safeguarding Allegations

Any complaints or allegations involving safeguarding concerns about staff, management, or students will be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The DSL will follow statutory safeguarding procedures, including making referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) or Children's Social Care as required. Confidentiality will be maintained, and the welfare of the child will always be the primary concern.

Appeals Process

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they may request a review or appeal. Appeals regarding staff or student complaints should be directed to the Headteacher or governing body, while complaints about management should be referred to an independent panel convened by the governing body. The decision of the appeal process will be final.

Confidentiality and whistleblowing

Sometimes a complainant will wish to remain anonymous. It is always preferable to reveal your identity and contact details to us, however, if you are concerned about possible adverse consequences please inform us that you do not wish for us to divulge your identity. If it helps to reassure you on this point, we can confirm that we are not obliged to disclose information if to do so would be a breach of confidentiality and/or any other legal duty. 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. At all times we will investigate such complaints from whistle-blowers in accordance with relevant whistleblowing legislation.

What will happen to my complaint?

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 2 working days, letting you know who is investigating your complaint. We aim to initiate the investigation of the complaint within 10 working days. If your complaint is more complex, or involves people who are not available at the time, we may extend this to 20 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 to inform you of our decision.

What happens if my complaint is upheld?

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 arrangements and assessment process (if relevant) or arranging for staff training. In extreme circumstances, internal disciplinary procedures may be exercised where the performance or behaviour of our staff is deemed inappropriate. In situations where a complaint has been

successful and indicates a failure in our assessment processes we will take appropriate actions such as:

- Identify any other learner 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
- Ensure that the failure does not recur in the future.

What if I am not happy with the reply?

If you disagree with the decision the first point of call is the Director - Olivia Campbell. If you are still unhappy with the decision taken by Next Steps Ed CIC in reviewing the complaint you can then take the matter through our appeal arrangements which are outlined in our Appeals Policy.

This will be the final route of escalation within our company. Therefore, if you remain unhappy after following our own internal complaints procedure and your complaint refers to services you have received relating to your course and achieving your qualification, then please contact the awarding organisation directly. The awarding organisation is Highfields Qualifications and their complaints policy can be located on their website:

<https://www.highfieldqualifications.com>

Alternatively, please speak to the Highfield Qualifications team on **01302 363277**.

Should you address your complaint to Highfield Qualifications and remain unhappy with the outcome, you may then raise your complaint to the relevant qualification regulator in each instance and provide contact details.

OFQUAL for RQF qualifications

Monitoring

Next Steps Eds' directors will be responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the complaints process. Summary reports will be submitted to enable the Committees' to review the effectiveness of the process and, where appropriate, monitor changes to the policy and procedures, which will be submitted annually to the Board of Trustees for monitoring and appropriate action.

Contact us:

If you have any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact our support team by:

Call:

E-mail: