

Bedford Training and Assessment Centre Complaints Policy and Procedure

Bedford Training Assessment Centre is committed to providing quality training, apprenticeships, qualifications and assessment to learners and apprentices. BTAC is required to have a policy and procedure in place to manage and respond to allegations involving the conduct of staff, learners and third party training and assessment providers who provide services on behalf of Bedford Borough Council. This policy is based on providing services that are fair and reasonable and afford a forum where issues or inadequacies can be raised and resolved. This process provides opportunity for complaints to be recorded, acknowledged and dealt with in a fair, efficient and effective way. The object of this policy is to ensure that Bedford Borough staff act in a professional manner at all times. This policy provides learners, apprentices and employers with a clear process to register a complaint and have it dealt with in a timely way and ensure that all parties involved are kept informed of the resulting actions and outcome. This policy is written in line with the Bedford Borough Council complaint procedures.

BTAC and Bedford Borough Council are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, morality and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees, and others that we deal with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work to come forward and voice those concerns.

BTAC acknowledges any individual or an organisations' right to lodge a complaint when they are dissatisfied with the training and /or assessment services and experiences that they have been provided with; and they will ensure that there is a fair and equitable process for expressing and managing complaints.

In doing so, BTAC:

- has written procedures in place for collecting and managing complaints in a constructive and timely manner;
- ensures that these procedures are communicated to all staff, third party partners and clients;
- ensures that all necessary documentation and resources are in place to enable individuals to submit a complaint;
- ensures that each complaint and its outcome is recorded in writing;
- ensures that complaint and their outcomes are fed into continuous quality improvement activities.

A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of the service or training BTAC has provided. Natural justice and procedural fairness are used to ensure that decision making is fair and reasonable. It underpins the rights of all parties to be heard and informed without bias. Appeals are regarded as a formal request for a change in or a confirmation of a decision. Appeals can be made in regards to an assessment decision or in regards to the initial outcome of a complaint.

This policy covers both academic and non-academic matters.

Academic matters include those which relate to:

- Learner or apprentice progress
- Assessment
- Course content
- Non-academic Matters include those related to:
 - Enrolment or misinformation given about a course, qualification or apprenticeship
 - Personal information about the learner or apprenticeship which is held by BTAC.

The following 10 principles will be followed:

1. The principles of natural justice and procedural fairness are adopted at every stage of the complaint process.
2. Complaints are treated seriously and dealt with promptly, impartially, sensitively and confidentially.

3. Complaints will be resolved on an individual case basis, as they arise.
4. All complaints are acknowledged in writing and finalised as soon as practicable or by following the timeline stated in the policy
5. The complaint resolution procedure is based on the understanding that no action will be taken without consulting the complainant and respondent, using a process of discussion, cooperation and conciliation.
6. The rights of the complainant and respondent will be acknowledged and protected throughout the complaint resolution process
7. In the interest of confidentiality, the number of people involved in the resolution process will be kept to a minimum.
8. If the complaints process fails to resolve the complaint or the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint, then they have the right to appeal using the appeals process.
9. Each party must be given written notice of the decision of the review and this must include the reasons for the decision
10. Victimisation of complainants, respondents or anyone one else involved in the complaint resolution process will not be tolerated. All complaints will be handled in a way that will not affect or bias the progress of the learner or apprentice in any current or future training.

The Manager for HR Strategy and Workforce Development is the Complaints Resolution Officer. The HR strategy and Workforce Development Manager may delegate responsibility for the resolution of the complaint to the Team Leader / Lead Quality Assurer if necessary. Details regarding the scope of the Complaints Policy must be clearly communicated to all learners, apprentices and employers, and be included in the Staff Induction Process, Learner or apprentice induction and handbook, and displayed on the BTAC webpage on the Bedford Borough website.

Process

Informal Complaint

Informal complaints usually relate to minor disputes of difficulties that can be resolved with minimal or no assistance. If a learner, apprentice or employer has a complaint, they are encouraged to speak immediately with the trainer/assessor to resolve the issue. If the staff member from BTAC feels that the issue is above their understanding, skill set or responsibilities they will inform the Team Leader / Lead Quality Assurer who must establish a timeline in relation to when a decision/ action will be taken in relation to the complaint. The length of time to remedy or investigate an issue may vary depending upon the nature of the complaint but will usually be no longer than 7 working days. Attempts will be made to resolve issues as quickly as possible to ensure the matter is addressed in a timely way, and to prevent the complaint from escalating unnecessarily. If the complainant is not satisfied, then a formal complaint must be lodged.

Formal Complaint

Formal complaints must be made in writing within 7 working days of the incident or no resolution at the informal complaint stage in writing to the Team Leader /Lead Quality Assurer. The Team Leader / Lead Quality Assurer will initiate a transparent and fair investigation to identify the issues. Formal complaints, wherever possible, are to be resolved preferably within 14 working days of the initial complaint. The Team Leader / Lead Quality Assurer will inform the Manager for HR Strategy and Workforce Development that there has been a complaint and advise if a resolution has been achieved. If the outcome is not to the satisfaction of the complainant, they may raise the complaint in writing within 7 working days to the Manager for HR Strategy and Workforce Development.

If the complainant is still not satisfied with how the complaint has been handled they may be directed to an outside party such as the External Quality Assurer at CACHE or OFSTED for further advice.

Bedford Borough Council is committed to equality and diversity to ensure it meets its duties under equality legislation. This commitment and ambition for ensuring excellent equality practice is set out in the workforce equality report.

Records of all complaints and their outcomes will be maintained securely. Records of complaints include:

- How the complaint was dealt with;
- The outcome of the complaint;
- The timeframes for resolution of the complaint;
- The potential causes of the complaint;
- The steps taken to resolve the complaint.

All complaints practices are monitored by the BTAC Governance board and will be discussed at meetings with areas for improvement identified and acted upon.

Bedford Borough Council also has a **Confidential Reporting Policy**. This policy sets out how other staff members can raise any serious concerns that they have about any aspect of BTAC's service provision, the conduct of BTAC staff or management or any others acting on their behalf.

This policy also links with the **Learner Disciplinary Policy** which aims to ensure that all learners and apprentices are able to learn in an environment that is free from bullying, harassment and discrimination from other learners. This policy outlines the procedure that is taken in the event of a complaint being made towards another learner or apprentice within a classroom that is deemed misconduct and the stages of disciplinary action that may be taken to protect them.