



# Comments, Suggestions and Complaints Guidance

Version 5

Directorate:	Communities and Neighbourhoods ( Employment and Training)
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This guidance will be reviewed on an annual basis. Poplar HARCA reserves the right to amend this guidance, following consultation, where appropriate.

Date created:	November 2023
Date of next review:	November 2024

## 1. Guidance Statement

Poplar HARCA aims to provide high quality services that meet the needs of our learners, staff and our wider communities.

We welcome comments, complaints and suggestions from all members of the community, from prospective students and from the general public. All complaints and suggestions are taken seriously and are not regarded as a criticism of individuals.

The complaints and suggestions procedure has been developed to encourage constructive comments, so that we can make adjustments to and improve the way we work.

The procedure is based on a shared understanding of how we would all like to be treated if we need to make a complaint or a suggestion. This includes being:

- ✓ taken seriously and listened to courteously
- ✓ assisted in explaining and clarifying the problem
- ✓ told who is dealing with the feedback and when a reply can be expected
- ✓ given a full and prompt response
- ✓ kept informed of progress and receiving an explanation of any delay
- ✓ advised on what to do next if you are still unhappy

Whilst we are committed to providing the best possible service, and we recognise that occasionally stakeholders may feel that they have cause to complain about the service they have received.

We encourage feedback from all stakeholders, including complaints.

If you are not satisfied with the way we have handled your complaint, this will be dealt with as a failure of service under the terms of our Complaints Guidance.

Poplar HARCA aims to resolve complaints quickly, fairly and effectively. We will:

- Aim to put things right quickly for our stakeholders when they go wrong
- Keep our learners, staff and other stakeholders informed of the progress of their complaint and result of any investigation
- Seek to learn from each complaint to improve future performance
- Set performance targets for responding to complaints and monitor our performance against these targets
- Advise our stakeholders of the right to complain externally if they are dissatisfied after their complaint has been through all stages of the internal complaint procedure

Poplar HARCA Complaints Guidance and procedure are readily available to all staff, learners, employers and other stakeholders. It is also available on our website at [www.poplarharca.co.uk](http://www.poplarharca.co.uk)  
All of our policies are reviewed at least annually or when legislation/ guidance is updated.

## 2. Monitoring

Poplar HARCA is committed to continuous improvement in service delivery.

- We will make it easy and straightforward for you to make a complaint

- We will endeavour to respond to your complaint within the timescales and keep you informed
- We will ensure that you have a full explanation to your complaint in your preferred format
- We will tell you if changes have been made to services following your complaint
- We will review our guidance at regular intervals

### **3. Responsibility**

Poplar HARCA in partnership with the senior management team and all education staff are responsible for developing and encouraging good customer care handling practice.

### **4. Equality & Diversity**

Staff, learners and other stakeholders have the right to express dissatisfaction with the services they receive from Poplar HARCA. This guidance ensures that stakeholders can expect to be treated fairly and without discrimination.

Please see Equality and Diversity and Inclusion Guidance for further information.

### **5. Procedure**

All stakeholders have the right to complain and appeal against any aspect of service delivery. Poplar HARCA support our stakeholders when they feel that our service has fallen below their expectations. Each complaint or appeal will be dealt in a professional and courteous manner by a relevant member of staff. The nature of the complaint or appeal will determine which member of staff will investigate and take action.

#### Complaints from learners

The purpose of the complaint's procedure is to ensure that, as far as possible, complaints from learners are dealt with informally (unless they are of a serious nature) and resolved to the learner's satisfaction whenever possible. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction concerning a product or service provided by Poplar HARCA. Poplar HARCA take all complaints extremely seriously and all staff are trained and committed to rectify any problem as soon as it is brought to their attention.

It is recognised that a customer who has a complaint dealt with to their complete satisfaction is likely to become a repeat customer. Therefore we ask that if you are dissatisfied with the service you have received that you bring this to our attention as soon as possible by speaking to your course Tutor in the first instance.

Complaints can be presented verbally or in writing as follows:

Tel: 0207 510 9770

E mail: [complaints@poplarharca.co.uk](mailto:complaints@poplarharca.co.uk)

Write to: Complaints, Poplar HARCA, 155 East India Dock Road, E14 6DA

When you contact us, please give us your full name, contact details, and include 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; and
- Copies of any papers or letters to do with the complaint.

Poplar HARCA ask that you raise your complaint as soon as possible after the event so that we have the opportunity to investigate fully.

The process for dealing with complaints has an informal and a formal element. The formal stage can only be initiated after the informal stage has been exhausted.

The procedure is based on the following principles:

- A learner has the right to be accompanied by a colleague or friend at every stage of the formal procedure.
- Any complaints, to become formal, must be made in writing as soon as possible
- The complaint should remain confidential if at all possible
- A set of minutes will be taken at each meeting and a copy given to the learner
- The learner will be given a set of timescales which can be adjusted at the convenience of the learner and the person listening to the complaint
- If the person listening to the complaint feel the matter is too trivial for the complaint's procedure, s/he can advise the learner of other options
- If both the learner and the staff member cannot agree, the learner is entitled to make a formal complaint and is able to add new or additional information/evidence if it is able to make things clearer
- A learner cannot represent a complaint that has been addressed in the past unless new information is brought forward. If it is the complaint may be rejected at this stage
- Complaints regarding assessment **MUST** be channelled through the Appeals procedure and **NOT** the Complaints procedure.

#### Informal Stage (Stage 1)

- If the complaint is about a member of staff, it may be possible to invite that person to attend an informal meeting. The meeting to take place within 10 days from the original complaint.
- If the complaint is about another learner, both parties should be encouraged to resolve the issue with an intermediary.
- If it is not possible to have a face-to-face meeting to resolve the issue informally, the complaint can be moved on to the formal stage.

#### Formal Stage (Stage 2)

If the complaint has not been resolved at the informal stage and/or the learner wishes to proceed to the formal stage, the learner can elect to do so. The complaint will be heard by the Community Training Manager. At this stage the complaint must be in writing and outline the nature of the complaint and what needs to be done to put things right.

The Community Training Manager will appoint an independent senior staff member to conduct an investigation of the complaint.

Should the complaint be against a named individual or individuals, the Community Training Manager will provide the individual(s) with a copy of the complaint at the first opportunity to do so.

The investigation should be carried out as quickly as possible, normally within 15 working days. The learner will be presented with a report summarising the findings of the investigation and any actions or recommendations. (Stage 3)

If the learner is still dissatisfied with the outcome, they are entitled to proceed to the final stage - stage 3.

The Community Training Manager will convene a Complaints Panel made up of a Director, a Professional colleague not employed by the Centre and the Community Training Manager. After considering all the information presented, the Panel will inform the learner of its decision, normally within 10 working days. The Panel's decision is final and will be classed as a concluding determination of the matter.

Written records of this complaint will then be kept in the Complaints File for three years and then destroyed.

### **Escalating your initial complaint if you remain dissatisfied**

In the unlikely event that you remain unhappy after your complaint has been investigated and a decision reached then you may escalate your complaint to our Director of Services. Please include any further items for consideration and state clearly why you remain unhappy with the decision taken so far. The Director of Services will investigate in full and respond to you within 14 working days.

The Director of services can be contacted on:

Call: 0207 510 9770

E-mail: [thehivetraining@poplarharca.co.uk](mailto:thehivetraining@poplarharca.co.uk)

Write to: The Hive Training, Poplar HARCA, 155 East India Dock Road, E14 6DA

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 for each qualification is different. Please contact the Community Training Manager for details of the Awarding body relevant to your course. For example, for one of our awarding bodies is Highfield Qualifications and their complaints guidance 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. Either a representative of Poplar HARCA or Highfield Qualifications will be able to offer you guidance on the appropriate qualification regulator in each instance and provide contact details.

\*The following list of Qualification Regulators are provided as additional guidance:

- OFQUAL for RQF Qualifications in England

Alternatively, if you started a qualification funded by the Greater London Authority you can escalate your complaint to the GLA at:

[skillscomplaints@london.gov.uk](mailto:skillscomplaints@london.gov.uk)

## **6. Whistleblowing**

Whistleblowing is the term used when a staff member passes on information concerning wrongdoing. In this guidance, we call that "making a disclosure" or "blowing the whistle". The wrongdoing will typically (although not necessarily) be something they have witnessed at work.

To be covered by whistleblowing law, a staff member who makes a disclosure must reasonably believe two things. The first is that they are acting in the public interest. This means in particular that personal grievances and complaints are not usually covered by whistleblowing law.

The second thing that a staff member must reasonably believe is that the disclosure tends to show past, present or likely future wrongdoing falling into one or more of the following categories:

- criminal offences (this may include types of financial impropriety such as fraud)
- failure to comply with an obligation set out in law
- miscarriages of justice
- endangering of someone's health and safety
- damage to the environment
- covering up wrongdoing in the above categories

Whistleblowing law is located in the Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and Gov.uk guidance 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013). It provides the right for a staff member to take a

case to an employment tribunal if they have been victimised at work or they have lost their job because they have 'blown the whistle'.

Please see separate Whistleblowing Guidance for further details.

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