

Complaints against ACC, its Board or Committees

Part 1 is a preamble that is common to the complaint's procedures of ACC.

See Part 2 for this specific process.

Part 1

ACC views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person/or organisation that has made the complaint.

Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
- To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- To make sure everyone at ACC knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do

Definition of a complaint

A complaint is when someone brings to ACC's attention any deviation from standard good practice of service whether justified or not, about any aspect of ACC.

Where complaints come

They may come from any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in ACC such as clients, members, donors, members of the local community.

A complaint can be received initially verbally by phone but ultimately by email or in writing.

This policy does not cover complaints from staff, who should use ACC's Discipline and Grievance policies.

Confidentiality

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Board of Trustees through the Chair

Review

This policy is reviewed regularly and updated as required.

Adopted on: 30/09/2015 Last reviewed: March 2023

Complaints should be emailed to complaints@acc-uk.org.

Part 2

Stage One

A complaint about the way ACC acted or dealt with issues, by a committee or its Board (for example that it had not followed procedural matters appropriately) would follow the complaint procedure after first of attempting to resolve the matter informally with the complainant.

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate.

Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the Chair of ACC within one week.

On receiving the complaint, the Chair records it in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, they delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a week.

The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaint's procedure should be attached to any email response. It can be sent by post if specifically requested by the complainant.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks.

If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

If the search for resolution was unsuccessful ACC would seek an independent investigator (i.e. not a member of ACC so that impartiality would be assured).

If the investigator reported that there was a case to answer ACC would convene a panel to hear the complaint and investigator's report. The panel would comprise of a manager of a Counselling Agency (i.e. not having any prior involvement with the complaint) and two others from different ACC affiliates (i.e. none would be trustees, directors, contractors or employees of ACC).

The Panel's decision and any required actions would be notified to both parties by the panel Chair.

If ACC was found to be at fault in any way, it would consider the panel's recommendations and make an appropriate response to the panel and the complainant.

Either party can appeal the decision, in which case a separate panel is convened with different personnel on the same basis as the first.

The outcome of this panel hearing would be final. ACC would abide by the outcome of that panel.

The advice of the Register Advisory Panel will be sought at each stage.

It is to be noted that if the complaint concerned an accusation that ACC breached charity law the complainant could go direct to the Charity Commission. If the complainant agreed to follow ACC's complaint process and a Panel hearing felt that Charity Law had been broken then they too could notify the Charity Commission.

Stage Two

If the complainant or ACC feel that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, either party can appeal the decision and a new panel of similar makeup but of all new personnel convened to hear the appeal.

The decision taken at this point is final and there is no further right of appeal.

A Board level review would take place to consider learning and recommendations for improving the way ACC works. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Deputy Chair.

The timescales are already stated in ACC Complaints Procedure.

Variation of the complaints procedure

The Board may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about the Chair/CEO should not also have the Chair/CEO as the person leading at any stage.

Stage Two review - monitoring and learning from complaints

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.