



# **Complaints & Appeal Procedure**

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## **1 Introduction**

Skills North East Ltd, (SNE) always prides itself on delivering first class customer service. The delivery of an outstanding customer experience is a key tenant of its strategic objective and organisational values.

However, SNE also recognises that sometimes things may not meet these high standards. It actively encourages feedback from a range of service users and will be open and transparent in its resolution of complaints and in learning lessons from them.

This procedure aims to ensure that complaints are resolved promptly and fairly. The procedure covers all areas of activity. The procedure can therefore be used by any learner, apprentice, parent, employers, member of staff, visitor, contractor or member of the local community who has reason to be unhappy with the service provided by SNE.

The procedure covers complaints in whatever form they are received, we encourage feedback both positive and negative through a range of channels including over the telephone, in person with a specific member of staff, via the contact us button on the website and via social media channels. In whatever form complaints are received, the principles of this procedure shall still apply.

We strongly believe that most issues can be resolved quickly and at the informal stage of our process. However, for more serious incidents or incidents where the informal stage has not been able to resolve matters there are two further formal stages to the complaints process and then recourse for individuals to take their complaint to external bodies who have oversight of the quality and funding for all aspects of the college's provision.

### **Stage 1 – Informal Resolution**

If you have a potential complaint, you should raise this informally in the first instance with your Line Manager (if you are a SNE employee) or Tutor (if you are a Learner). Staff are trained to deal with complaints and will aim to resolve this with you to a satisfactory outcome within 48 hours.

SNE will record the complaint for future reference and to track all complaints received by the Business. A copy of the response will be logged in the Central Complaints Record and will be subject to Document Maintenance Procedures regarding the safe storage of records and documents.

If resolution cannot be found at the informal stage or matters are too significant for the informal approach to be appropriate individuals may wish to make a formal complaint.

## **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**

A formal complaint must be made within three months of the issue first arising and must be made in writing to:

Quality Director  
Skills North East Ltd.  
Unit 6 Apex Business Village  
Annitsford  
NE23 7BF

A formal complaint will be dealt with in the following manner:

- The Quality Director (QD) will appoint an Investigating Officer. In the event the complaint is about the QD, the QD will refer this to the Board to appoint an Investigating Officer.
- The Investigating Officer will acknowledge receipt of the complaint from the complainant formally within 48 hours of receiving it and will set out the process to be followed which will follow the format below:
  - Initial research and investigation
  - Interviews with the relevant parties
  - Collecting of evidence and the discovery process
  - Formulating conclusions
  - Report writing and determining outcomes
  - Final evaluations and lessons learned
  - Communication of outcomes and lessons learned

The timescale for a full resolution to a formal complaint is set at 7 days; however, where this is not possible, the Investigating Officer will contact the Complainant to advise of the reasons for delay. The Complainant will receive communication every 3 working days, either verbally or preferably by email. The Complainant will receive a copy of the final report as well as a copy of the recommendations, and the QD will respond formally to the Complainant with official details of what the business propose to do about the Complaint that was raised.

SNE will act on anonymous complaints in exceptional circumstances and where it felt that matters are significant and serious enough to warrant investigation without knowing the details of the complainant.

## **Stage 3 – Internal Appeal**

In most cases complaints can be resolved within stage two. However, it may be that the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution proposed or outcome of the complaint. In these instances individuals have the right to appeal.

Appeals should be made in writing to the Managing Director and should be made within ten working days from the receipt of the original response letter.

The Managing Director will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within two working days. They will then consider the original investigation, any evidence that was not considered as part of the original complaint and the reasonableness of the proposed resolution. They will determine whether the appeal has grounds and will respond in writing within ten working days from the date of receipt.

The response made by the Managing Director will outline whether the appeal has been upheld in full, partially, or not at all, and may suggest an alternative resolution to that proposed in the original response. The decision of the Managing Director is final and as such, internal procedures for complaints are deemed to have been exhausted at this stage.

## **2 Complaints about a senior post-holder or concerns about potentially fraudulent, corrupt or irregular activity and whistleblowing**

SNE has a separate Whistleblowing Policy which covers complaints against a senior post-holder or concerns about potentially fraudulent, corrupt or irregular activity are dealt with via SNE's Whistleblowing Policy. A copy can be provided on request.

## **3 Continuing a complaint beyond SNE**

For learners and employers involved in accredited programs, individuals have the right to seek independent external review via the relevant Awarding Body Complaints Procedure if they remain unsatisfied with the outcome of any complaint once all internal procedures have been followed.

For all none Awarding Body related issues, individuals have the right to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency 08000 150 600 or <https://tinyurl.com/ESFAForm>

Both agencies will want to satisfy themselves that the internal complaints processes of SNE have been exhausted prior to acting upon complaints.