

Complaints Policy

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Name & Position: Paul Monk – CEO
Signed on behalf of the Board
Date: 15/12/2021

Complaints Policy

Policy Statement

Alpha Development is committed to providing a supportive working and learning environment to enable all to achieve their goals. We strive to provide the highest quality services and to be responsive to concerns or complaints from any of our customers, whether they are of teaching or service-related nature. Both negative and positive feedback is recognised as a valuable resource to enable us to improve the quality of our services and apprenticeship provision.

So that Alpha Development can learn and improve on feedback given; accurate and complete records of all complaints received, resulting correspondence, interviews and actions taken will be maintained. A report on complaints received and their outcomes will be submitted to the HR Manager/Safeguarding Officer on a monthly basis. Complaints relating to issues with a direct impact on qualifications and apprenticeships will be passed to the Head of Apprenticeships and Qualifications for consideration to help to improve customer service throughout the business. The effectiveness of the complaints procedure will be evaluated on an annual basis by the Head of Apprenticeships and Qualifications.

The purpose of this complaints procedure is to enable anyone interacting with Alpha Development to raise matters of concern about our services or provision to our attention, so that they can be investigated and resolved in the clearest and fairest way possible. In most cases, this will be achieved without having to conduct the formal complaints procedure; which should be a last resort in reaching a solution.

This policy is accessible to all parties with whom Alpha Development has a relationship and will be published on our website. It will be reviewed annually.

What is a Complaint?

The complaints procedure covers any expression of dissatisfaction or concern about:

- Provisions of Alpha Development affecting customers (applicants, apprentices, employers, stakeholders)
- Actions or lack of actions by Alpha Development or its staff
- Standards of service, courses or facilities provided by Alpha Development.
- The procedure does not cover the following:
 - Matters covered by separate policies or procedures including Equal Opportunities and Grievance Procedures.
 - Appeals against a marking decision or the award of a qualification. In these cases, the complainant should follow the Appeal Procedure of the Awarding Organisation.
 - Judgement about individual apprentice performance or awarding organisation assessment decisions
 - Requests for new services or provision

This procedure is for use by any existing or prospective student, apprentice, employer or customer who seeks or receives a service from us. It also extends to anyone who may be directly affected by our services or activities.

Anonymous complaints will be logged and monitored but not investigated under normal circumstances.

Complaint Management

We recognise that many concerns may be raised informally and can be dealt with quickly and simply. We aim to resolve early and promptly, preferably keeping it as close to the source of the problem as possible and dealing with it by informal means. By encouraging complainants to come forward with concerns at an early stage, matters can be discussed, and any misunderstandings resolved by telephone conversation, face to face meeting, email or letter to the appropriate person.

Stage 1 – Informal

An informal approach is appropriate in some cases; these complaints will be responded to by the appropriate person within 7 days receipt of the complaint. You may make a complaint by phone if you wish to remain anonymous. The number is 020 3589 9350.

If the problem is not resolved satisfactorily at this stage, complainants should raise the matter with the Customer Service Team (customerservices@alphadevelopment.com) for a formal investigation.

Stage 2 – Formal

Alpha Development recognises that informal mechanisms may not resolve all problems and that some problems may be too serious or sensitive to be dealt with by raising the issue directly with the member of staff involved. In these circumstances, the formal complaints procedure should be used.

- A formal complaint should be submitted to the Customer Service Team in writing to customerservices@alphadevelopment.com
- The statement of complaint should be as thorough and complete as possible and include any supporting documentation
- The Customer Service Team will log and acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 48 hours
- The complaint will be passed on to the most appropriate person to deal with the complaint and they will become the 'complaint owner' (in most cases this will be the Account Director). It is the complaint owner's responsibility to fully investigate the complaint within 14 working days of this being received
- The complaint owner will pass their findings back to the Customer Service Team for the central complaints log to be updated with the agreed outcome
- The complaint owner will update the complainant of the outcome of their complaint
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the response received as a result of Stage 2, the complaint may be taken to Stage 3 of the procedure.

Stage 3 – Appeal

A copy of the complaint (with any supporting evidence) should be sent to the Customer Service Team within 14 days of receiving the Stage 2 response. The Customer Service Manager will hear the complaint and review the evidence. The Customer Service Team will investigate the complaint, including all documentary evidence.

The Customer Service Manager will acknowledge receipt of the stage 3 complaint within 5 working days of receipt and respond within 20 working days. Inevitably some issues will be more complex and may, therefore, require longer to be fully reviewed. Consequently, all timescales given for handling and responding to stage 3 complaints are subject to change.

The Customer Service Team may seek to resolve the complaint based on the documentary evidence alone.

Following investigation, a written response will be produced detailing whether the complaint is upheld or not and detailing action(s) necessary to resolve the issue.

The decision of the Customer Service Team is final. If the complaint involves a qualification being delivered by Alpha Development, the complainant will be able to approach the awarding organisation and initiate their complaints procedure. Alpha Development will be able to advise if this is the case.

If the complainant is unhappy with the resolution of a query or complaints regarding apprenticeships, these can be escalated to the ESFA Apprenticeship Service Support on 08000 150 600 or helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk.

Confidentiality

All complaints will be treated seriously, handled sensitively and with due consideration to all parties involved. In line with our equal opportunities policy, all complainants will be treated fairly and not suffer

any recrimination or disadvantage as a result of making a complaint. Any person named in a complaint, however, will be informed and have a right of reply as part of the investigative process.

Complaints must be made by complainants themselves, however, we recognise that some apprentices and vulnerable adults may have difficulties with this and so encourage them to use whatever assistance is required from a third party to make their complaint effectively. The HR Manager/Safeguarding Officer can provide general support and advice on procedures; however, it is the complainant's responsibility to seek guidance and support when necessary.

Recording a Complaint

Complaints received are logged onto a central complaints log. The reason for the complaint and all progress made during the life of a complaint is recorded on the log until it is resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant or to a point at which Alpha Development can reasonably be expected to do no more.

Ownership of a Complaint

Once a complaint has been received and recorded it will be assigned by the Client Service Team to the appropriate person within the business to resolve e.g. HR Manager/Safeguarding Officer, Account Manager. The complaint owner will usually be the one who is most closely aligned to the area of the business against which the complaint has been raised. The owner of the complaint will then be responsible for ensuring the complaint is investigated and resolved. The owner will also be responsible for updating the Customer Service team of the outcome.

Progressing a Complaint

The complaint owner will ensure the complaint is fully investigated and that regular communication is maintained with the complainant throughout the life of the complaint. Under the normal process, we will acknowledge complaints within 48 hours and resolve within 14 working days, but inevitably some issues will be more complex and may take longer. Where this is the case, we will contact the parties within 15 days by phone and in writing with an interim response describing our investigation and when it is expected to be complete. Correspondence will be retained and attached with the complaint log for our records.

Reviewing a Complaint

Once a complaint has been defined by the owner as resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant or to the point where Alpha Development can reasonably do no more, the Customer Service team will update the central complaints log with all details of the outcome and mark the complaint as resolved. All documentation will be kept for future reference to defend any potential legal challenge.

The Customer Service manager will review all complaints on a monthly basis and consideration will be given to whether an opportunity exists to avoid a reoccurrence of a similar complaint and to support with implementing any service improvement actions. This will be discussed at the Quality Circle meeting.

Closing a Complaint

Once the complaint has been investigated and resolved to the complainant's satisfaction – or to the point where Alpha Development can reasonably do no more – the central complaint log will be updated with the time, date and name of both the person who has resolved the complaint and also the Customer Service Team member amending the report to 'resolved'.

Monitoring and Reporting

The Customer Service team will maintain a central complaint log for Alpha Development and provide weekly and monthly updates to the Performance Quality and Administration Manager. A quarterly report will be produced for the board; this report should identify trends and business risk.