

Feedback and Complaints Policy

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1. Purpose and scope

Best Practice Network (BPN) values feedback and uses it to improve programmes, services and stakeholder experience. This policy explains how learners, apprentices, students, applicants, employers, partners, parents or carers, members of the public and other stakeholders can provide feedback or make a complaint.

It applies to complaints about BPN services, programme delivery, administration, communication, learner support and the way BPN has applied its procedures. It does not replace separate academic appeals, assessment appeals, safeguarding, whistleblowing, data protection or staff grievance procedures.

2. Definitions

Feedback: a compliment, suggestion or general comment that does not require a formal investigation.

Complaint: an expression of dissatisfaction about a BPN service, action or failure to act that requires a response or investigation. A complaint does not have to use the word “complaint”.

Academic or assessment appeal: a challenge to an academic, assessment, reasonable adjustment, special consideration, malpractice or progression decision. These matters will normally be handled under the relevant appeals procedure rather than this policy.

3. Our commitments

- Treat people fairly, respectfully and without disadvantage for raising a concern in good faith.
- Make reasonable adjustments and provide information in an alternative format where needed.
- Use an investigator who is appropriately independent and has no material conflict of interest.
- Give clear reasons for decisions and explain the next available route of review or external escalation.
- Keep records, review themes and use learning to improve services.
- Protect confidentiality as far as possible, while sharing information where necessary to investigate, meet legal duties or protect someone from harm.

4. Choosing the correct route

Issue	Route
Service, communication, support, administration or programme delivery	Use this Feedback and Complaints Policy.
Assessment result, academic decision, reasonable adjustment, special consideration or malpractice decision	Use the relevant BPN or awarding organisation appeals procedure.
Immediate safeguarding risk	Use the Safeguarding Policy and contact emergency or statutory services where required. Do not wait for the complaints process.
Wrongdoing in the public interest	Use the Whistleblowing Policy.
Use of personal data or information rights	Use the Data Protection Policy or privacy notice and, where appropriate, contact the Information Commissioner's Office.
Employment matter	Use the relevant staff grievance or human resources procedure.

5. How to give feedback or make a complaint

You can contact BPN using the method that is most accessible and convenient for you:

- **Email:** feedback@bestpracticenetwork.co.uk
- **Telephone:** 0117 920 9200
- **In person:** Speak with a member of the BPN team
- **Post:** Director of Quality & Compliance, Best Practice Network, Newminster House, 27-29 Baldwin Street, Bristol, BS1 1LT

Please provide your name and contact details, the programme or service involved, what happened and when, any relevant evidence, what steps you have already taken, and the outcome you are seeking. A representative may complain on your behalf where you provide consent, unless another lawful basis allows us to engage with them.

Anonymous complaints will be considered, but anonymity may limit our ability to investigate, verify evidence or provide an outcome.

6. Informal resolution

Where it is appropriate and safe, BPN will try to resolve concerns promptly with the relevant team. You may ask for the matter to be treated formally at any point. Serious, repeated or high-risk concerns may move directly to formal investigation.

7. Formal complaint process

- Acknowledgement: within 2 working days.
- Triage: BPN will confirm the scope, correct procedure, investigator and any reasonable adjustments.
- Investigation: relevant evidence will be reviewed and affected people may be invited to comment.
- Outcome: normally within 20 working days of receipt. The response will explain the findings, reasons, any remedy or improvement action, and the next escalation route.
- Delay: if more time is needed, BPN will explain why and give a revised date.

BPN may pause the process where a related police, safeguarding, regulatory, legal or awarding organisation process could be compromised. If this happens, BPN will explain what can be shared and keep the position under review.

8. Escalation process

The following escalation process applies where a concern cannot be resolved at the first point of contact. A complaint may move directly to a later stage where it is serious, complex, presents a safeguarding or regulatory risk, or requires greater independence.

Stage	Route	Lead	Target timescale	Outcome / next step
Stage 1	Informal resolution	Relevant BPN team or programme contact	Promptly, wherever possible	Concern resolved and any agreed action confirmed. If unresolved, the complainant may request Stage 2.
Stage 2	Formal complaint and investigation	Appointed investigator with appropriate independence	Acknowledged within 2 working days; outcome normally within 20 working days	Written findings, reasons, remedy or improvement actions, and details of how to request Stage 3.
Stage 3	Internal escalation and review	Programme Director, Managing Director, or another suitably independent senior person not materially involved in Stage 2	Request within 10 working days of the Stage 2 outcome; final response normally within 20 working days	Final internal response. This will explain whether the complaint is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld, confirm any action, and identify any applicable external route.
Stage 4	External escalation	Relevant external body, awarding organisation, partner institution or ombudsman	In line with the external body's own time limits and eligibility rules	Independent consideration within that body's remit. External bodies will normally expect the relevant BPN or partner process to have been completed first.

Stage 3 review grounds. The request should explain why the procedure was not followed, relevant evidence was overlooked, the decision was unreasonable, or new evidence could not reasonably have been provided earlier. The review is not normally a full reinvestigation.

How to escalate. Requests for Stage 3 escalation must be made within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome and sent to feedback@bestpracticenetwork.co.uk or by post to: Director of Quality & Compliance, Best Practice Network, Newminster House, 27-29 Baldwin Street, Bristol, BS1 1LT. BPN will acknowledge the request and confirm who will conduct the review.

If BPN cannot meet a stated timescale at any stage, it will explain the reason for the delay and provide a revised response date. Where an external route applies, the final internal response will name the appropriate body and provide the relevant link or instructions.

9. Higher education programmes and the OIA

This section applies only where the complainant is a student on a higher education programme that falls within the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) Scheme, including where BPN delivers a programme with or on behalf of an OIA member higher education provider and the provider's arrangements state that the OIA route applies.

At the end of the applicable internal complaints or appeals process, the responsible OIA member provider will issue a Completion of Procedures Letter where required. The letter will identify the final decision and the deadline for bringing a complaint to the OIA. The OIA is a free and independent student complaints scheme; it is not a further internal appeal stage.

Students normally need to submit their complaint to the OIA within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures Letter or final decision. More information and the online route are available at www.oiahe.org.uk/students/how-to-complain-to-us/

Where BPN is not the OIA member or is delivering under a partner institution, BPN will confirm whether the final internal stage and Completion of Procedures Letter sit with BPN or the partner. Nothing in this policy should be read as extending OIA eligibility to a programme or person outside the OIA Scheme.

10. External escalation and useful links

External bodies usually expect the relevant internal procedure to be completed first. Their role and powers differ, and some bodies review complaint handling rather than replacing the provider's decision.

Body	When it may be relevant	Link
Department for Education (DfE)	Further education, apprenticeships or other DfE-funded provision after the BPN process has been completed.	Open guidance
DfE Customer Help Portal	Submitting a DfE enquiry or complaint.	Open guidance

Body	When it may be relevant	Link
Ofsted	Ofsted signposts complaints about further education and apprenticeships to the DfE after the provider procedure. Use Ofsted routes for matters within its remit.	Open guidance
Ofqual	Concerns about an Ofqual-regulated awarding organisation or regulated qualification, normally after the awarding organisation process. Ofqual does not handle complaints about teaching quality.	Open guidance
Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)	Eligible students on programmes covered by the OIA Scheme, after completion of the applicable internal process.	Open guidance
Highfield Qualifications	Complaints or appeals relating to Highfield qualifications. Learners should normally complete the centre process first.	Open guidance
Highfield Assessment	Complaints or appeals relating to Highfield end-point assessment.	Open guidance
NCFE	Complaints relating to NCFE products, services or qualifications, normally after the centre process.	Open guidance
NQual	Complaints or appeals relating to NQual qualifications or end-point assessment.	Open guidance
Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)	Concerns about personal data or information rights after raising the matter with BPN.	Open guidance

Body	When it may be relevant	Link
BPN policies	Related BPN policies, including appeals, safeguarding, data protection, equality and whistleblowing.	Open guidance

11. Confidentiality, data protection and records

BPN will process personal data in line with data protection law, its Data Protection Policy and privacy notice. Information will be shared only where there is a lawful and necessary reason, including investigation, quality assurance, safeguarding, legal or regulatory reporting. Complaint records will be retained in line with BPN's retention arrangements. Published learning and governance reports will normally be anonymised.

BPN privacy notice: www.bestpracticenetwork.co.uk/privacy-notice

12. Remedies and organisational learning

Where a complaint is upheld or partly upheld, action may include an explanation, apology, correction, service improvement, staff guidance or training, reconsideration under the correct procedure, or another proportionate remedy. BPN will monitor delivery of agreed actions and review themes through its quality and governance arrangements.

13. Unreasonable behaviour and repeat complaints

BPN may take proportionate steps to manage behaviour that is abusive, threatening, discriminatory, excessively repetitive or places unreasonable demands on staff. Restrictions will relate to behaviour, not to the fact that a complaint has been made. Wherever practicable, BPN will explain the concern, set reasonable boundaries, identify a contact route and provide a review point. New and material evidence will still be considered.

14. Review arrangements

This policy will be reviewed annually, or earlier following changes to legislation, regulation, funding rules, partner requirements, awarding organisation arrangements or learning from complaints.