

Acumen Community Enterprise Development Trust

Complaints and Compliments Procedure

INTRODUCTION

Users of Acumen services, staff, volunteers and partner organisations have the right to make a representation criticising or praising services provided. The objective of the Complaints Procedure is to provide a means of redress for those unhappy with the services of, and actions of Acumen and to improve the quality of services and procedures. Having a Complaints Procedure is a critical part of maintaining our credibility as a service provider and therefore the way in which representations are handled is important.

Information held on the Complaints file will primarily be used for the planning of future services and to ensure that clients, volunteers and partner organisations get the best quality service possible.

1. Comments and complaints will be welcomed and responded to positively and promptly. They can come from clients, from purchasers, from volunteers and partner organisations and from our own staff
2. Any person wishing to make a complaint may be supported and accompanied by a person of their choice. Where there may be language or communications difficulties, Acumen will make every effort to enable effective communication, through the provision of appropriate support.
3. Comments and complaints will be dealt with courteously, fairly and will be kept confidential.
4. If a complaint is directed at a particular member of staff, he/she will be given the opportunity to respond. Any correspondence, report or other record relating to the representation will be available to all concerned unless they contain confidential information. No member of staff will investigate a complaint against him/herself.
5. Complainants will be kept informed of the course of their complaints and of the action being taken throughout.
6. Acumen operates an open access policy for clients to look at their own files at any time – this includes access during the Complaints procedure.

7. All clients and purchasers must be informed that Acumen has a Complaints Procedure. A users' leaflet will be produced to explain the operation of the procedure.

8. Acumen will make every effort to deliver services with the aim of full customer satisfaction.

PROCEDURE

1. Complaints can come from clients, a representative of a client, a potential client, a purchaser, volunteers and partner organisations or staff members.

2. Complaints can come in any form - verbal or written.

3. Definition of a complaint;- a complaint arises when an issue is brought forward that remains irreconcilable and either party wants further action to be taken, and/or where there has been a [serious] breach of Acumen's policies.

STAGE 1

The first stage of the Complaints Procedure will be dealt with within the project or office concerned.

The staff member initially receiving any complaint should clarify that it is the complainants intention to raise a formal complaint and ascertain what action they would like us to take. Is it:

- An issue that a client wishes to bring to the attention of Acumen without requiring any further action to be taken, other than its being recorded?
- A complaint that they wish to have formally investigated and resolved?

Failure to record complaints made verbally, by phone or in writing will be viewed as a disciplinary matter, as will deliberate attempts to obstruct users from knowing about and using the system.

All complaints must first be brought to the attention of the Team Leader/Manager (if they are the subject of the complaint, see below for guidance). The complaint will be recorded on a complaints form, signed and agreed by the complainant. The entry will include; complainant's name, date of complaint, nature of complaint, who is dealing with it, current action being taken and the outcome. Any person making a representation will receive a written acknowledgement within 5 working days. Anonymous complaints will be registered, but can only be acted upon when a pattern of inappropriate behaviour is suggested.

Where complaints/allegations are of a serious nature they will be reported to a member of the Senior Management Team on the same day. Where allegations concern the conduct of the Team Leader/Manager involved, they should be passed on immediately to a Senior Manager. Clients should be informed that they can make a complaint direct to a Senior Manager or the Chief Executive, should they have any concerns about dealing with the matter with the project direct.

If the complaint is resolved and the user is satisfied with the outcome, no further action will be required and this should be recorded in the Complaints file together with a Statement of Satisfaction signed by the complainant.

STAGE 2

If the complainant is unhappy with the decision after Stage 1 (above) then it will require resolution at a higher level. The Team Leader/Manager should notify the Chief Executive or a Senior Manager in writing within 2 days. This may also be done at the request of the complainant, even if the Team Leader/Manager believes the matter could be resolved at their level.

In all cases proceeding to Stage 2 and beyond a Senior Manager will be appointed as Investigating Manager to impartially investigate and report on the complaint.

The matter will be investigated and a full, written reply will be sent within 28 days of the representation being made and sent to the complainant's home address. This will include a decision as whether the complaint or aspects of it have been upheld and where appropriate what action is to be taken.

Where complaints legally require that we involve and relinquish responsibility to other agencies (e.g. police, social services) then delays may result in any action that Acumen can take. Some complaints may result in action being taken under the terms of other Acumen policies which will have to take precedence until they are completed.

All complaints made under the terms of the Whistleblowers Policy (matters of serious malpractice or impropriety) will be brought directly to Stage 2 and dealt with at this level. The Chief Executive will consult with the Chair of the Board and where necessary the investigation will be dealt with by a nominated Board member.

The outcome of this should be registered in the Stage 2 Investigations File kept at the Head Office of Acumen.

STAGE 3

If the person making the complaint is not satisfied with the outcome from Stage 2, he/she should register this within 14 working days of receiving written notification of the outcome of the complaint. Acumen will then call an independent panel comprising: 1 Board Member, 1 relevant Agency Partner's Senior Manager and 1 independent person to Chair. The person making the representation will be informed of the date on which the panel will meet and will be given the opportunity to attend the meeting with a representative of their choosing; at this Stage, both parties (Acumen and person making representation) may be present and may present their case to the panel.

The Complaints panel may commission an independent investigation in its absolute discretion.

The panel may at its sole discretion decide to verbally inform the parties of the outcome of the meeting immediately, nevertheless a further written reply will then be sent within 21 days of the panel's meeting. The panel will make its decision in private.

9. At any of the above stages, the relevant Investigating Manager may interview the relevant parties, giving reasonable notice of the interview, in writing.

10. Acumen will do all it can to keep the complainant informed and, on completion, the complainant will be notified in writing, of the outcome and reasons for actions and decisions made.

11. Should any party undertake legal proceedings, use of the Complaints Procedure will be reviewed by the Chief Executive, who may decide to suspend the Complaints Procedure until legal proceedings have finished.

Compliments

Team Leaders will set up a file for each project entitled "Compliments file". This file will be utilised to retain any compliments that the project may receive about its services. This could include letters, cards etc for clients who have used Acumen Trust services. The file will be monitored annually by the appropriate head of service. This information will be collated and summarised. The information will be monitored by the Senior Management team and used to inform future provision.