

Customer Feedback & Complaints including Apprenticeship appeals process



The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace Group) Ltd and Solace In Business Ltd (together, "the Solace group") are trusted providers of quality services to the public sector.

Customer views on the service we provide are important to us, whether they're positive or negative. If we fail to deliver the standard of service expected, or if we make a mistake, we would like to know. In such circumstances, the reported matter will be reviewed and any necessary action taken to put things right as quickly as is practicable. Your feedback will help us to improve our services.

This policy outlines the core aims and intended approach to the handling of compliments, comments and complaints regarding services provided by the Solace group. The policy is designed to:

- be responsive to the needs of our customers
- be transparent and easy to understand
- reflect best practice
- establish clear minimum standards that can be monitored and reported
- help us learn from compliments, comments and complaints to improve our services

Who/what does this relate to?

We will review and respond to all complaints equally, whether regarding a service, a member of staff, an associate or a partner organisation. The approach outlined below applies to all aspects of the Solace group, with additional elements specific to our apprenticeship programme delivery and learner appeals.

Complaints definition

It is not possible to provide a definitive list but the following are examples of situations that would constitute a complaint:

- the quality or management of our service delivery
- learner dissatisfaction with apprenticeship programme content and/ or delivery methodology
- undue delay or non-compliance with published procedures
- poor administration, including lack of response to queries
- equality and diversity issues
- health and safety concerns (unless these are matters for the Health and Safety Executive)
- website and e-learning issues

How can compliments, comments and complaints be made?

We aim to ensure that making a complaint is as easy as possible. However, many matters can be resolved informally so we would encourage you to contact your programme manager/director in the first instance.

But if you feel the problem needs to be put on a more official footing, please follow the process below.

For **Solace In Business Ltd** services, by telephoning 02079763311 or emailing contactsib@solace.org.uk

For **The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace Group) Ltd** services *except apprenticeships*, by telephoning 02072330081 or emailing contactsolace@solace.org.uk

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For **apprenticeship service complaints**, by emailing trudy.birtwell@solace.org.uk or telephoning 02045993291. For **other apprenticeship issues** call 02072330081 or email apprentices@solace.org.uk

There is a separate and specific process for **apprenticeship learner appeals** connected to their programme achievement or any individual element of it and this is set out in Appendix 1 to this Customer Feedback & Complaints policy.

Complaints handling and process

We treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for an immediate response and we will:

- deal with it promptly, politely and, when appropriate, confidentially;
- respond in the right way, for example, by giving you an explanation or an apology where we have got things wrong, and letting you know what action we've taken;
- learn from complaints and feedback and use them to improve our service.

We have developed a standard approach to help ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and, wherever possible, resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

In summary: we'll record and acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days and confirm who will be dealing with it; we will appoint an appropriate person to investigate the matter on your behalf; we aim to resolve complaints within 10 working days but if it's going to take longer than that we'll keep you fully informed.

Our aim is to resolve all matters as quickly as possible; however, inevitably some issues will be more complex and therefore may require longer to be fully investigated.

Our standard approach is:

- Complaints will be passed to a relevant programme manager or head of service who will send an acknowledgment within five working days.
- The acknowledgment will include details of how the complaint will be dealt with, provide a named contact within the organisation, ask for any further details required regarding the complaint and ascertain the required outcomes.
- If appropriate, detailed enquiries will be made which may include interviewing anyone involved. Enquiries will be carried out by an appropriate person within the organisation, usually a manager or director.
- If a complaint relates to a director it will be dealt with by another director (which may include a non-executive director).
- Recommendations will be based on any findings; they will be put to a director for review and decision and the outcome will be recorded.
- The decision will be conveyed as quickly as possible to all involved, followed up in writing where appropriate.
- Customers will have the right to respond to our communicated complaint outcome.

The outcomes

The outcomes of any compliment, comment or complaint will be decided in each individual case. In all instances, the feedback will be used to help further improve our services. Other possible outcomes may include:

- A 'thank you' for compliments or positive comments
- The request to use feedback in future promotional literature
- An apology for poor service
- The re-working of part of an assignment or service
- Removal of an associate and/or member of staff from remaining parts of the activity

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- Development or training for members of staff, with disciplinary action a possibility if deemed appropriate to the circumstances
- Critical friend analysis for involved associates, with removal from the organisation’s associate register if deemed appropriate in the circumstances
- The use of mediation for contractual disputes

Right to respond

If the outcome is considered by anyone involved to be unsatisfactory they may write to the Managing Director of the Solace group, Graeme McDonald, at the organisation’s registered office address (currently: Off Southgate, Pontefract, WF8 1NT) or by emailing graeme.mcdonald@solace.org.uk

In such circumstances the initial outcome will be reviewed and a follow-up response sent as appropriate.

Once the Solace group has determined that an effective response has been made, there will be no further comment or response.

If an apprenticeship learner is dissatisfied with the processing of their complaint, or the response received, the apprentice and/or their employer has the right to escalate the complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency via its apprenticeship helpline on 0800 015 0400 or 0247 682 6482, or by email at nationalhelpdesk@apprenticeship.gov.uk

Post Assignment Assessments

To facilitate this process, customers and associates will be sent a Post Assignment Assessment (PAA) for completion. This will help us assess the quality of our services and capture best practice. Although the submission/receipt of PAAs is not acknowledged, they are analysed to help us improve our services and any complaints made through a PAA will be dealt with in accordance with this policy.

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Appendix 1: Learner Appeals Process

Appeals against assessment decisions normally happen in one to four stages, each dealt with by different personnel within the Solace apprenticeship team or the ILM. These are:

Stage 1 - Assessor

Stage 2 - Internal verifier

Stage 3 - Principal verifier/ Director responsible for training

Stage 4 - Awarding body

In detail:

Stage 1

Should an apprentice not be satisfied with an assessment decision (failed or referred), they should put the grounds for appeal, in writing, within **fourteen** days of receipt of the decision, to the relevant Solace Programme Manager. This should be submitted by email to apprentices@solace.org.uk. The apprentice will receive a response within **fourteen** days of receipt of the appeal.

The Solace Programme Manager will communicate the appeal to the relevant assessor.

The assessor will consider the grounds for appeal and makes a decision, based on the evidence presented and the reasons provided.

The assessor's decision, together with reasons, is communicated to Solace Programme Manager, who will communicate this to the learner and record details of the transaction.

Stage 2

Should the learner not be satisfied with the outcome of the appeal, they should put the grounds for their appeal, in writing, within **fourteen** days of receipt of the assessor's decision, to Solace Programme Manager. This should be submitted by email to apprentices@solace.org.uk and the learner will receive a response within **fourteen** days of receipt of the appeal.

The Solace Programme Manager will communicate the appeal to an internal verifier.

The internal verifier will consider the grounds for appeal and makes a decision, based on the evidence presented and the reasons provided.

The internal verifier's decision, together with reasons, is communicated to Solace Programme Manager, who will communicate this to the learner and record details of the transaction.

Stage 3

Should the learner not be satisfied with the outcome of the appeal, they should put the grounds for their appeal, in writing, within **fourteen** days of receipt of the internal verifier's decision, to Solace Programme Manager. This should be submitted by email to apprentices@solace.org.uk. The learner will receive a response within **fourteen** days of receipt of the appeal.

The Solace Programme Manager will communicate the appeal to the Programme Director.

The Programme Director responsible for training will consider the grounds for appeal and make a decision based on the evidence presented and the reasons provided.

The Programme Director's decision, together with reasons, is communicated to Solace Programme Manager who will communicate this to the learner and record details of the transaction.

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Stage 4

Should the learner not be satisfied with the Programme Director's decision they can institute the external appeals procedure as defined by the Awarding Bord, details of which will be supplied on request.

Written records and evidence

Solace will keep written records and evidence of any appeal for a period of seven years from the date of appeal.

Further information

If further information about the appeals procedure is needed, please email apprentices@solace.org.uk

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