

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Policy

Introduction

This document sets out our complaints policy and procedure and is aimed at our centres, learners and all interested parties who encounter a direct or indirect service from Ascentis. We value all the centres delivering our qualifications and the learners who undertake them and our aim every day is to exceed the expectations of our customers.

We are confident of providing a high quality service and would be extremely disappointed if this is not the case.

Therefore, it is important should you feel you have encountered a level of service that is below both your and our expectations that you raise any concerns you may have with us immediately so that we may address them and improve our services.

Scope

This policy covers complaints centres, learners or members of the public may wish to make in relation to the qualifications and associated services offered by Ascentis.

It is not to be used to cover appeals in relation to decisions made by Ascentis. These areas are covered by our Appeals Policy. Should a complaint be submitted which is in fact an enquiry or an appeal we will respond to inform the relevant party that the issue is being considered, where appropriate, in accordance with the approach outlined in our Customer Service statement or Appeals policy.

If you are unhappy about the way an examination or assessment was delivered and conducted and you suspect malpractice or maladministration may have occurred, you should send your concern to us in accordance with the arrangements in our Malpractice and Maladministration Policy.

Examples of complaints could be:

If Ascentis fails to adhere to its own procedures in respect of any aspect of service delivery. If the service received from an Ascentis employee or associate was below expectations.

Centres responsibility

Centres should take all responsible steps to ensure that their staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of our qualifications, and your learners, are aware of the contents of this policy and that your centre has a complaints handling procedure and appeals process in place to deal with complaints from learners about the services they provide from your centre. If an individual is unhappy about a service or activity being delivered by a centre it must first of all go through the centre's complaints process before bringing the matter to Ascentis.

Review arrangements

We will review the policy and its associated procedures annually as part of our self- evaluation arrangements and revise it as and when necessary in response to customer, learner or regulatory feedback (e.g. to align with any appeals and complaints process established by the regulators) and any trends that may emerge in the subject matter of complaints received.

If you would like to feedback any views, please contact us via the details provided below.

Procedure

How should I complain?

Informal process

Our staff are here to assist you and deal with your complaint as timely as possible, you should first try to sort out any problem informally at the earliest opportunity by speaking to the person who dealt with you.

If they cannot help or you wish to speak to someone else, you can ask to speak to the manager in charge.

Formal process

If it is not possible to resolve your complaint informally, or if you are not satisfied with the help provided by the manager, and/or if the handler is likely to have been involved in the incident subject to the complaint, please send a formal written complaint, normally within one month of the event you are complaining about, and address it to us at the contact details outlined at the end of this policy.

Learners and/or members of the public who wish to complain about a level of service provided by the centre at which they have taken an Ascentis qualification should have exhausted their centre's own complaints process before bringing the complaint to us. However, learners can make the complaint directly to us in exceptional circumstances where they feel there was a significant breach by the centre of our various procedures (contact details are contained at the end of this policy).

If I complain what details do I have to give?

When you contact us, please give us your full name, contact details including a daytime telephone number along with:

- a full description of your complaint (including the subject matter and dates and times if known)
- any names of the people you have dealt with so far
- copies of any papers or letters to do with the complaint

Complaints brought to our attention by the regulators

Where the regulators notify us about failures that have been discovered in the assessment process or other activities of another awarding organisation, these will be reviewed in the same manner as other external complaints in accordance with the procedures below to ascertain if the same issue could affect Ascentis qualifications.

Confidentiality and whistle blowing

Sometimes a complainant will wish to remain anonymous. However, it is always preferable to reveal your identity and contact details to us, and if you are concerned about possible adverse consequences please inform us that you do not wish for us to divulge your identity. If it helps to reassure you on this point, we can confirm that we are not obliged (as recommended by the regulators) to disclose information if to do so would be a breach of confidentiality and/or any other legal duty. While we aim to maintain anonymity where requested, please be aware that in some cases the nature of any subsequent investigation(s) may make it possible to identify an individual.

While we are prepared to investigate issues which are reported to us anonymously and/or by whistleblowers¹ we shall always try to confirm the grounds of an allegation by means of a separate investigation, before taking up the matter with those the complaint/allegation relates.

¹ Ascentis defines whistleblowers as being current or ex members of staff (either permanent or contracted) or third party suppliers of a centre or Ascentis and/or current or previous learners.

What will happen to my formal complaint?

We will acknowledge receipt of your formal complaint within 2 working days, letting you know who is investigating your complaint.

We aim to investigate the complaint within 10 working days. If your complaint is more complex, or involves people who are not available at the time, we may extend this to 20 working days. We may contact you within this period to seek further information or clarification (in some instances we may recommend a meeting). At the end of the investigation we shall write/email to inform you of our decision.

Successful complaints and/or issues brought to our attention by the regulators If any part of your complaint is upheld, we will of course respond to the complainant accordingly and give due consideration to how we can improve our service and arrangements. For example, by reviewing our procedures to assess the impact on our qualification development, delivery or awarding arrangements and assessment process (if relevant) or arranging for staff training. In extreme circumstances, internal disciplinary or other relevant procedures may be exercised where the performance or behaviour of our staff is deemed to be inappropriate.

In situations where a complaint has been successful, or where an investigation following notification from the regulators indicates a failure in our processes, we will give due consideration to the outcome and will take appropriate actions such as:

- a) identify any other learner who has been affected by that failure
- b) correct, or where it cannot be corrected, mitigate as far as possible the effect of the failure, and
- c) ensure that the failure does not recur in the future.

How do I make a formal complaint?

If you disagree with the decision or response you receive as an informal complaint, the next point of call is the Head of Legal, Risk and Data Protection/Privacy who oversees the formal complaints procedure.

If you are still unhappy with the decision taken by Ascentis in reviewing the complaint you can, where relevant, take the matter through our Appeal arrangements which are outlined in our Appeals Policy.

Contact us

If you have any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact the LRD department:

Email: legal@ascentis.co.uk

Tel: 01524 845046

Post: Ascentis House, 3 Mannin Way, Lancaster Business Park, Caton Road, Lancaster, LA1 3SW