

COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE

Centre Version

INTRODUCTION

The Queensland Little Athletics Assoc Inc. (QLAA) and its affiliated Centres are committed to the provision of quality services. A consistent approach to the handling of complaints is integral to effective service delivery.

The aim of the Complaint Handling Procedure is to define complaints and the system for dealing with complaints submitted or referred to the (insert name of Centre here). It serves to ensure that complaints are dealt with fairly and impartially and strives to satisfactorily resolve disputes between the Centre and complainants in a timely fashion.

DEFINITIONS

Complaint

A complaint is defined as a formal expression of dissatisfaction with some aspect of the Centre's services, policies and procedures, whether justified or not.

A complaint does not include a request for information or clarification of QLAA/ Centre rules, policies, procedures or decisions.

Complainant

The person lodging the complaint.

Minor Complaint

A complaint dealing with a matter that can be explained or resolved by existing rules, policies and procedures.

SCOPE

Only complaints where the complainant has identified him/herself are covered by this procedure. Anonymous complaints are not within the terms of this procedure although it is expected that the validity of such complaints will be assessed and corrective action taken, if necessary.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Centre will induct all committee members on the processes involved in the Complaint Handling Procedure and the communication skills required for effective complaint handling.

LODGING A COMPLAINT

Complaints may be lodged with the Centre:

- in person
- by telephone
- by facsimile, email or letter

and should detail the name, address and contact phone numbers of the complainant, together with a brief description of the problem.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Centre will not disclose the identity of a complainant if that complainant requests that their details remain confidential.

PROCEDURESMinor verbal complaints

1. On receipt of a verbal complaint, the relevant committee member will immediately determine if the complaint is of a minor nature; who is the most appropriate person to deal with the complaint; and/or whether they themselves possess the required knowledge to attempt resolution.
2. If the complaint is of a minor nature and it is known that another committee member can deal with the matter on the spot, then the complaint will immediately be referred to that person.
3. If the complaint is one to which relevant committee member is able to attempt resolution, then they will listen to the complaint in accordance with the guidelines set out in Appendix A of this procedure.
4. The relevant committee member will address the complainant's concerns in a detailed and complete manner, outlining how or why the situation or incident occurred, being clear on what solutions can be offered. The relevant committee member will aim to answer the points raised in positive, professional and caring manner.
5. If the complaint requires further investigation, the complainant will be advised of the course of action and provided with a target date for providing a response.
6. If, after discussion and/or investigation, the complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved it may be:
 - Referred for further discussion and possible resolution with the Centre Manager
or
 - Documented by the complainant in written format and forwarded to the Centre Committee for further attention
7. If it is determined that the Centre has made an error, the matter will be referred to the Centre Manager/ Committee to determine the appropriate course of action.
8. Committee members will document all verbal complaints on a Complaint Form detailing the name address and contact details of the complainant, together with a brief description of the problem and the resolution/outcome. The completed form will be passed onto the Centre Manager for corrective action, where required, and/or filing. Additionally, all complaints will be recorded in the Complaints Register, detailing the name of the complainant, the nature of the complaint and the resolution/action taken.
9. If the complaint is about an incident, person or operation at a Zone or Association level and the matter has not been brought to the attention of the Zone/Association for attempted resolution, then the matter should be referred to the Zone/Association in the first instance.

If the complaint is made by phone, the complainant is to be given details of the Zone/Association and the person with whom they should lodge the complaint, by the committee member receiving the call.

If the complaint is received in writing, the Centre Secretary will arrange for a copy of the complaint, to be sent to either the Zone/ Association. The Secretary will also acknowledge receipt of the complaint to the complainant advising that the matter has been referred to either the Zone/ Association.

Written Complaints

1. All written complaints will be entered in the incoming mail register by the Centre Secretary, and then referred to the Centre Manager, on the day of receipt if possible. If the complaint is about the Centre Manager, it will be referred to the Centre Committee as soon as possible.
2. Within three (3) working days of receipt of the complaint, the Centre Manager shall contact the complainant to acknowledge the complaint and explain the procedure to be applied. A target date for providing a response will also be advised.
3. If the complaint is about another person, they should also be told about the procedure and the target date for resolution.
4. All complaints should aim to be resolved within 28 days.
5. If the outcome of the investigation is delayed, the Centre Manager will contact the complainant and where applicable, the person who is the subject of the complaint, to keep them informed as to the progress.
6. The Centre Manager will review the complaint and investigate as they consider appropriate. This may include contacting/interviewing witnesses and/or other persons involved. Written records will be kept of all meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.
7. If there is any concern regarding the legal implications of a complaint, the Centre will either seek independent legal advice or contact the Association for advice and resolution of the matter will be based upon the advice provided.
8. Once all of the relevant facts have been established, the Centre Manager will produce a written response to the complainant, or may refer the matter directly to the Centre Committee. Such response will include a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it and where applicable and appropriate, what action the Centre will take to resolve the complaint.
9. Prior to writing to the complainant to report the outcome of the investigation, the Centre Manager should discuss the complaint and the findings with the Executive Committee, to confirm the outcome.
10. If following the response from the Centre Manager the complainant remains unsatisfied and renews the complaint; the complaint will be referred to the Centre Committee.
11. Within three (3) working days of renewal of the complaint, the Centre Manager shall write to the complainant to confirm that a review will be carried out. A target date for providing a response to the review will also be advised.
12. If the outcome of the review is delayed, the Centre Manager will contact the complainant to keep them aware of the progress.
13. If the complainant remains unsatisfied following any review and further investigation, the complainant may seek external mediation, in accordance with the Centre Constitution.
14. The Centre Manager/ Secretary will ensure that all complaints are recorded in the Complaints Register, detailing the name of the complainant, the nature of the complaint and the resolution/action taken.

REVIEW

It would be good practice for the Centre Committee to review at least annually the volume and type of complaints received and use this information, as a basis for assessing member's needs and attitudes towards the Centre's services and activities. The volume and type of complaints can be used to establish benchmarks for improvement.

REFERENCES

- University of Wollongong, "Client Service and Complaints Handling", 1996
- Mosman Municipal Council, "Complaints Handling", 2005
- Little Athletics Association of NSW Inc., Procedure LAA-014-01 "Corrective & Preventive Action", 1998
- Little Athletics Association of NSW Inc., "Complaints Handling", 2006
- Queensland Little Athletics Association Inc., "Complaints Handling", 2006

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMPLAINT HANDLING

Treat all complaints seriously	However small or trivial it may seem to you, the complaint will be an important problem for anyone who takes the trouble to complain.
Treat every complaint individually	Even if you have already received several similar complaints the same day, it is probably the person's first chance to have their say.
Listen	Listening is the first step in reducing tension
Be courteous and patient	Be sympathetic, courteous and helpful, but avoid laying on blame to other colleagues. Acknowledge the complainant's feelings.
Identify yourself	If you are unknown to the person, introduce yourself.
Ask for their name and use it	Anonymous complaints are acceptable only where there are special circumstances.
Take time to find out exactly what the problem is	It is easy for someone to forget to tell you an important detail, particularly if they are upset or annoyed. Ask the necessary questions. Confirm details received.
Don't take the complaint personally	To an angry or upset person, YOU are the Centre, and the only one they can put their feelings to right now. Do not be defensive. Do not argue with the complainant.
Stay cool and calm	Do not argue with the person - be polite and try to find out exactly what the person thinks is going wrong, or has gone wrong.
Check you are being understood	Make sure that the person understands what you are saying. Don't use jargon - it can cause confusion and annoyance to someone "not in the know".
Don't rush	Take your time. Let people have their say, and let off steam if they need to. Listen carefully and sympathetically to their problems before replying and attempting to find a solution or offer a next step.
Don't create false expectations	Explain courses of action that are realistically available.
Ensure a satisfactory outcome	Ask if the complainant is satisfied with the explanation or action taken / proposed. If not, give advice about available alternatives.

QUEENSLAND LITTLE ATHLETICS ASSOCIATION

COMPLAINT FORM

Complainants Personal Details

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Postcode: _____

Phone: (h) _____ (w) _____ (m) _____

Fax: _____ Email: _____

Complaint Details

If the complaint is about a person or organisation, please provide details:

Details of the complaint: _____

_____ (If insufficient space, use separate sheet)

Has the complaint been brought to the attention of the person/s involved / concerned?

Yes No

If Yes, what was the outcome? _____

QLAA feedback /advice given? _____

Complainant satisfied? Yes No

Signed: _____ Position: _____ Date: _____

COMPLAINT HANDLING CHART (for verbal complaints)

Expression of concern or complaint received

