

Education Achievement Service for South East Wales (EAS) Concerns and Complaints Policy

The EAS is committed to dealing effectively with any concerns or complaints you may have about our service. We aim to clarify any issues about which you are not sure. If possible, we will put right any mistakes we may have made. We will provide any service you are entitled to which we have failed to deliver. If we got something wrong, we will apologise and where possible we will try to put things right. We also aim to learn from our mistakes and use the information we gain to improve our services.

When to use this policy

When you express your concerns or complain to us about the services provided to you, we will usually respond in the way we explain below. Sometimes you might be concerned about matters that are not decided by us, we will then advise you about how to make your concerns known.

Where it is more appropriate for your complaint to be dealt with by your local authority, we will:

- let you know that we will refer the complaint to the complaints officer in that local authority; and
- forward your complaint to the relevant local authority.

Your complaint will then follow the complaints procedure of that local authority, a copy of which we will provide to you.

This policy does not apply if the matter relates to a Freedom of Information or Data Protection issue. In this circumstance, you should contact Information Governance Officer, Tredomen Gateway, Tredomen Park, Ystrad Mynach, Hengoed, CF82 7EH.

Informal resolution

If possible, we believe it is best to deal with things straight away rather than try to sort them out later. If you have a concern, raise it with the person you are dealing with. He or she will try to resolve it for you there and then. If there are any lessons to learn from addressing your concern then the member of staff will draw them to our attention. If the member of staff cannot help, they will explain why and you can then ask for a formal investigation.

How to express concern or complain formally

You can express your concern in any of the ways below.

- You can ask for a copy of our form from the person with whom you are already in contact. Tell them that you want us to deal with your concern formally.

- You can get in touch with our central complaint contact point on telephone 01633 415472/01443 864963 if you want to make your complaint over the phone.
- You can use the form on our website (in the 'Contact Us' link) at www.sewaleseas.org.uk or corporatecomplaints@sewaleseas.org.uk
- You can e-mail us at business.support@sewaleseas.org.uk
- You can write a letter to us at:

Corporate Complaints
EAS
Tredomen Gateway
Tredomen Park
Ystrad Mynach
Hengoed
CF82 7EH

Our concern and complaint forms are available on our website (www.sewaleseas.org.uk – in the 'Contact Us' link) and from Tredomen Gateway.

Copies of this policy and the complaint form are available in Welsh and as audio or large print.

Dealing with your concern

- We will formally acknowledge your concern within five working days and let you know how we intend to deal with it.
- We will ask you to tell us how you would like us to communicate with you and establish whether you have any particular requirements – for example, if you have a disability.
- We will deal with your concern in an open and honest way.
- We will ensure that the local authority in which the matter or issue took place, is provided with full details of the complaint within five working days of receipt
- We will make sure that your dealings with us in the future do not suffer just because you have expressed a concern or made a complaint.
- We will report to the EAS's Joint Executive Group that we are investigating the complaint that you have made.

What is the Joint Executive Group?

The executive function for education in the five local authorities who are members of the EAS has formed the Joint Executive Group. The Joint Executive Group commissions services from the EAS on behalf of each local authority.

When to raise your concerns or complaints

To allow us to consider whether we need to take any steps to put things right it is best to notify us of any concerns or complaints you may have as soon as is reasonably possible.

Therefore, normally, we will only be able to look at your concerns if you tell us about them within 12 months. This is because it is better to look into your concerns while the issues are still fresh in everyone's mind.

We may exceptionally be able to look at concerns which are brought to our attention later than this. However, you will have to give us strong reasons why you have not been able to bring it to our attention earlier and we will need to have sufficient information about the issue to allow us to consider it properly.

If you are expressing a concern on behalf of somebody else, we will need their agreement to you acting on their behalf.

What if there is more than one body involved?

If your complaint covers more than one body e.g. a school or education authority we will usually work with them to decide who should take a lead in dealing with your concerns. You will then be given the name of the person responsible for communicating with you while we consider your complaint.

If the complaint is about a body or person working on our behalf e.g. through a support services Service Level Agreement or consultant, you may wish to raise the matter informally with them first. However, if you want to express your concern or complaint formally, we will look into this ourselves and respond to you.

Investigation

We will tell you who we have asked to look into your concern or complaint. If your concern is straightforward, we will usually ask somebody from the service to look into it and get back to you. If it is more serious, we may use someone from a separate section of the EAS or in certain cases we may appoint an independent investigator.

We will set out to you our understanding of your concerns and ask you to confirm that we have got it right. We will also ask you to tell us what outcome you are hoping for. The person looking at your complaint will usually need to see the files we hold relevant to your complaint.

If there is a simple solution to your problem, we may ask you if you are happy to accept this. For example, where you asked for a service and we see straight away that you should have had it, we will offer to provide the service rather than investigate and produce a report.

We will aim to resolve concerns as quickly as possible and expect to deal with the vast majority within 20 working days. If your complaint is more complex, we will:

- let you know within this time why we think it may take longer to investigate
- tell you how long we expect it to take

- let you know where we have reached with the investigation, and give you regular updates, including telling you whether any developments might change our original estimate.

The person who is investigating your concerns will aim first to establish the facts. The extent of this investigation will depend on how complex and how serious the issues you have raised are. In complex cases, we will draw up an investigation plan.

In some instances, we may ask to meet you to discuss your concerns. Occasionally, we might suggest mediation or another method to try to resolve disputes.

We will look at relevant evidence. This could include files, notes of conversations, letters, e-mails or whatever may be relevant to your particular concern. If necessary, we will talk to the staff or others involved and look at our policies and any legal entitlement and guidance.

Outcome

If we formally investigate your complaint, we will let you know what we have found in keeping with your preferred form of communication. This could be by letter or e-mail, for example. If necessary, we will produce a longer report. We will explain how and why we came to our conclusions.

If we find that we got it wrong, we will tell you what and why it happened.

If we find there is a fault in our systems or the way we do things, we will tell you what it is and how we plan to change things to stop it happening again.

If we got it wrong, we will always apologise.

Appeals

In the event of you not being satisfied with the outcome of your complaint or how it has been dealt with the matter will be referred to the relevant local authority for their consideration.

Learning lessons

We take your concerns and complaints seriously and try to learn from any mistakes we have made. Our senior management team considers a summary of all complaints quarterly as well as details of any serious complaints. Our Joint Executive Board monitors complaints received and also considers our response to complaints.

Where there is a need for change, we will develop an action plan setting out what we will do, who will do it and when we plan to do it by. We will let you know when changes we have promised have been made.

What if I need help?

Our staff will aim to help you make your concerns known to us. If you need extra assistance, we will try to put you in touch with someone who can help.

You can also use this concerns and complaints policy if you are someone under the age of 18. If you need help, you can:-

1. Speak to someone on the Meic Helpline.
Tel: 08088 023456,
Email: www.meiccymru.org
2. Contact the Children's Commissioner for Wales.
Tel: 01792 765600 (South Wales),
01492 523333 (North Wales)
Email: post@childcomwales.org.uk or www.childcom.org.uk

South Wales Office:

Oystermouth House
Phoenix Way
Llansamlet
Swansea
SA7 9FS

North Wales Office:

Penrhos Manor
Oak Drive
Colwyn Bay
Conwy
LL29 7YN

What we expect from you

In times of trouble or distress, some people may act out of character. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a concern or a complaint. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined.

We believe that all complainants have the right to be heard, understood and respected. However, we also consider that our staff have the same rights. We, therefore, expect you to be polite and courteous in your dealings with us. We will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands or unreasonable persistence. We have a separate policy to manage situations where we find that someone's actions are unacceptable.