



Complaints and Grievances Procedure

Introduction and General Principles

BCPC aims to provide a service of the highest standard to all our users. This Complaints Policy and Procedure aims to provide a clear framework to help any individual who is not satisfied with the services of BCPC or any of its members to raise their concerns and to ensure that BCPC responds effectively.

BCPC aspires to operate within the framework of Humanistic Core Values in all dealings with others and in every part of the organisation. These values include respect for difference, honesty and an open and transparent process in dealing with conflict at all levels. Complaints will be treated in accordance with BCPC's policy on equality and fairness.

All practitioners are expected to adhere to the professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for BCPC Counselling & Psychotherapy Practitioners. To view our Code of Practice and Statement of Ethical principles go to our website >About Us.

From time to time the BCPC Standards & Ethics Committee may hear of a complaint or concern reported from another source –e.g. the Referral Service, a colleague or a third party. In these instances the committee may, in the interests of maintaining professional standards, decide to pursue an enquiry with a practitioner even if a complaint does not come to them directly from a client.

Anonymous or malicious complaints will not normally be investigated

About this Policy

If you are a member of the public who wishes to register a concern or complaint about a BCPC Accredited Practitioner please see **Section A.**

If you are a member of the public who wishes to register a concern or complaint about a BCPC Student Practitioner please see **Section B.**

For all other concerns or complaints see **Section C.**

If you are unsure how to proceed you may contact the office **Admin@bcpc.org.uk** or call **01225 429720**

Section A: Complaints against registered practitioners

The BCPC Standards & Ethics Committee is responsible for dealing with all concerns and complaints relating to its **qualified practitioners**.

BCPC can deal with complaints against qualified practitioners on an informal basis only. Anyone who is clear that they wish to make a formal complaint against a BCPC counsellor or psychotherapist should approach the appropriate Regulatory body directly (for UKCP: <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/registers-standards/complaints/>

and for BACP: <http://www.bacp.co.uk/crs/complaints.php>).

A member of the Standards and Ethics committee will assist with the initial approach to UKCP or BACP, if requested to do so.

If the S&E Committee receives a complaint with allegations of gross negligence or professional misconduct, they may wish to take action and will assist in helping the process to be taken forward through the proper channels.

1.0 Initiating a Complaint

- 1.1. We recognise that many difficulties arise through miscommunication, and conflict can quickly escalate. The first stage, where possible, is for an individual experiencing a difficulty to speak directly to the person concerned.
- 1.2 If the matter is not resolved through direct communication, or where this is too difficult or challenging for the complainant, the next step is to contact the BCPC Standards and Ethics Committee (bcpc.complaints@gmail.com)
- 1.3 The complainant will receive a response from the Standards & Ethics Committee within 5 days, and will be offered the opportunity to explain the details of their concern in a confidential setting via telephone.
- 1.4 Sometimes being heard by a third party is sufficient, but if the complainant decides to take things forward and make an informal complaint, s/he is sent copies of the Code of Ethics and the Complaints Procedure/ shown where to access these. S/he may request further assistance to describe the complaint, once it is clear that a breach in the Code of Ethics is perceived.
- 1.5 A record is made of when the issue arose and how the matter was first addressed. This record and all correspondence and written material pertaining to the process will be held with the utmost confidentiality. The complainant is reminded that at any point they are able to take the issue directly to the regulatory bodies UKCP or BACP (see above)

2.0 The Next Steps

- 2.1** At this point, if the complainant agrees, the practitioner who is being complained against may be advised of the complaint. They would then be sent a copy of the documentation itself, as well as a copy of this procedure.
- 2.2** The practitioner is invited by the appointed member of Standards and Ethics Committee, to respond in writing to any complaint within the following **two weeks**. Should the practitioner decline to give their account the procedure moves on regardless.
- 2.3** The complainant then has the opportunity to consider the response of the practitioner and to discuss this with the designated S&E Committee member. This may be sufficient to allow for direct communication to take place between the complainant and the practitioner and decide together how to achieve completion.
- 2.4** If resolution has not been possible, both parties, with the S&E Committee member, may suggest alternative solutions.

3.0 Mediation

- 3.1** If mediation is an acceptable way forward for both parties, a meeting is arranged. This meeting would take place at a mutually agreed and suitable venue and last up to two hours. This is an opportunity for dialogue, response and restoration of relationship.
- 3.2** The intention of mediation is to repair the harm done to the relationship and to move forward. In any dialogue that takes place, attention will be given to the power dynamics of the relationship involved. It may be this can be addressed by inviting parties to bring someone with them for support. This will be negotiated beforehand to ensure both parties are in agreement on this or any other proposed option.
- 3.3** The mediator will only be appointed with the agreement of both parties, and is engaged by the designated member of Standards and Ethics. The mediator's impartiality and expertise would be regarded as paramount.
- 3.4** If the mediation procedures employed do not lead to a mutually satisfactory outcome, both parties will be offered options on how to move forward. One option is to consider whether an additional meeting might bring about a satisfactory resolution. Another option is for a complaint to become formal through the mechanisms of the regulatory bodies referred to above.

4.0 Appeals

- 4.1** In the case of complaints undertaken through the formal processes of the regulatory bodies UKCP or BACP, any appeal against the outcome or process will be dealt with through those same bodies accordingly.
- 4.2** The Standards & Ethics Committee of BCPC is entrusted with the process of dealing with informal complaints as stated above; it is a sub committee of the Trustees and if a complainant is not satisfied with the way a complaint has been handled they may write to the Chair of Trustees, currently Peter Binns (binns.peter@gmail.com).
- 4.3** After the complaints procedure has been completed, the parties involved are invited to give feedback on the process.

Section B : Complaints against any student practitioners

The BCPC Director is responsible for dealing with all concerns and complaints from members of the public about any **student practitioner**. If it is not clear whether the practitioner is a student they may phone the BCPC office to enquire. The Director may be contacted via the BCPC office by telephone or by emailing TStaunton@bcpc.org.uk

The Process

- (i) The student is contacted after which the Director discusses the complaint informally with the student. The Director will contact the student's supervisor to ask for their input. A written summary of this discussion is then forwarded to the student. The Director will consider next steps. This may involve sanctions or conditions on the student's practice such as extra supervision. The Director will inform the complainant of the outcome of this initial investigation within 4 weeks.
- (ii) If this has not resolved the issue, the next, formal stage of the process is undertaken. The student is given a written statement of the complaint and advised about what specific steps need to be taken to remedy the situation within a given timeframe. The Director may consult the BCPC Standards & Ethics Committee for advice or additional perspective. The Director may hand the complaint over to the S&E Committee if

- (a) The Student requests an independent investigation.
- (b) The complainant requests a more formal investigation.

If the matter is considered to be a serious breach of ethics the student may be asked to leave the training.

- (iii) If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome at (ii) then the process is to be investigated which could include whether the complaints process was followed appropriately; whether the outcome was reasonable; if there was any other evidence to be presented which could not be seen earlier.

Section C: Complaints about training issues

From time to time a student is dissatisfied with some aspect of their training at BCPC and wishes to lodge a complaint. Students who wish to appeal against assessment outcomes should use the Academic Appeals Procedure in the relevant examination submission pack.

All other complaints about training should follow the procedure outlined in the Handbook– first raising their concerns with their tutor, and if they remain dissatisfied, contacting the Course Leader as outlined below.

1.0 The Process: informal stage

- 1.1 The student may have a preliminary and confidential discussion with the Course Leader outlining their concern.
- 1.2 The Course Leader will consult with tutors, office staff or other relevant parties, and will respond within 14 days.
- 1.3 The Course Leader will propose a resolution, in consultation with all relevant parties.
- 1.4 If both parties agree to mediation, this will be initiated within a further 14 days. The mediator will be agreed upon by both and may be either the Course Leader or the Director, or in some cases if requested an independent person such as a Trustee of the organisation. Any boundary issues perceived or actual will be respected, and any conflicts of interest declared at the outset.
- 1.4 Any travel costs or other costs as a result of an external mediator being requested will be paid for by both parties in the process and not by BCPC.
- 1.5 If one or other party decline mediation or if it is deemed too serious for mediation to be appropriate then a formal process will be initiated.
- 1.5 A written record will be made of any actions taken or resolutions agreed.

2.0 The Process: Formal stage

- 2.1 If the student is not satisfied with the result of the informal procedure, they may instigate a formal process by writing to the Director and any other staff members involved.
- 2.2 A written complaint should set out clearly what the complaint is about, providing any evidence in support. It should be submitted within 14 days following unsuccessful resolution at the informal stage.
- 2.3 The complaint will be reviewed by the Director who will meet with the student to hear a fuller account of the complaint.

- 2.4 The Director will meet with other relevant members of staff to hear the background to the complaint and respond to the student within 14 days.
- 2.5 The Director will propose a resolution, in consultation with all relevant parties. The Director may consult a member of the Training Committee for an independent perspective. This process should not take longer than one calendar month.
- 2.6 A written record will be made of any actions taken or resolutions agreed.

3.0 The Review or Appeals stage

- 3.1 If the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may lodge an appeal with the BCPC Training Committee. The role of the Training Committee is to consider whether the complaint has been dealt with fairly and according to the published procedure.
- 3.2 The Training Committee will appoint someone to look into the student's complaint and how it was managed. It is likely that the complainant will be contacted by the representative of the Training Committee to verify certain aspects of their complaint.
- 3.3 The representative will report their findings to the Director and to the Training Committee. The decision of the Training Committee will be final.
- 3.4 The student will be issued with a letter of completion.
 - 3.4(i) If the student is still not satisfied, they may appeal to the OIA (Office of the Independent Adjudicator) the independent ombudsman service to review the complaint. This must be done within 12 months following completion.
 - 3.4(ii) Students of Middlesex University also follow the students' complaints and grievances procedures at MU
https://www.mdx.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0025/490552/Student-Complaints-and-Grievance-Procedures.pdf
 - 3.4(iii) All other students should follow the OIA link
<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students> (/students/).
 - 3.4(iv) Please ask for a Completion of Procedure Letter from the office if you wish to proceed with the OIA.

Section D: All other complaints

If there is concern about the fitness to practice of a colleague on the BCPC Professional Register, a member may write to the Chair of the Standards and Ethics Committee with their concerns.

Staff wishing to complain about any aspect of their employment should use the 'Employee Grievance procedure' available from BCPC Office.

*Agreed by Trustees June 2016
Updated March 2019*