

Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School

Complaints Policy and Procedures

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Complaints Policy and Procedure

Introduction

A.T.C.M.S. recognises that from time to time some of our customers may have complaints, concerns or problems relating to the school that they wish to raise and have addressed.

It is expected that most of these issues will be able to be resolved informally, through local resolution with school staff.

However, where this is not possible, A.T.C.M.S. Complaints Procedure will provide a mechanism to facilitate these types of issues and should ensure that they are dealt with fairly and speedily to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Whilst it is impossible to provide a comprehensive list of all the issues that might give rise to a complaint, the more common are likely to relate to: classes, activities, tutors, access, health & safety, or equal opportunities.

The policy and procedure applies to all A.T.C.M.S. customers.

Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to fulfil A.T.C.M.S. statutory responsibility to specify, by description of otherwise, a process for our customers to express a complaint and to ensure that individuals have the necessary support to enable them to do so.

The procedures are designed to promote and encourage good customer relations across A.T.C.M.S.

AIMS OF THE POLICY

THIS POLICY APPLIES TO ALL CUSTOMERS OF A.T.C.M.S.

It aims to:

- Provide guidelines for Staff & Managers, which reinforce fairness and consistency in the treatment of individuals and in the conduct of customer relations.
- Encourage a ‘best practice’ ethos and assist A.T.C.M.S. to operate effectively.
- Allow individuals to raise issues or complaints with staff and management about the school, for example, issues arising from classes, activities, tutors, access, health & safety matters, or equal opportunities
- Provide a fair and speedy method of dealing with these complaints.
- Identify who has authority to respond to such complaints and the timescales for resolution.
- Provide examples of what are considered to be complaints for the purposes of this policy and procedures.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. All customers will be made aware of A.T.C.M.S. Complaints Policy and Procedures, and informed of how to access it through general communication and information materials.
2. Where necessary, A.T.C.M.S. will make copies available in other formats to satisfy the requirements of those customers with disabilities and those whose first language is not English.
3. Customers have a right to be given a fair hearing by the staff member dealing with their complaint and to have their complaint considered at a more senior level of management where the matter remains unresolved.
4. It is essential that the procedure should operate rapidly and efficiently unless there are exceptional circumstances that prevent this.
5. The proceedings of complaint hearings and any associated records kept will remain confidential unless they are required for the purposes of a third party investigating / hearing disciplinary matters emanating from the complaint, or A.T.C.M.S. is instructed by one of the agencies established by legislation to release their content for inspection. This includes subject access requests received under the Data Protection Act. In this last case we will make reasonable attempts to anonymise information identifying third parties.

INFORMAL COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

The existence of A.T.C.M.S. Complaints Policy and Procedures does not absolve A.T.C.M.S. or its staff from their responsibility to make every effort to resolve issues through existing lines of communication between customers and staff established within A.T.C.M.S.

Most routine complaints are best resolved informally in discussion with the customer and staff member. Dealing with complaints in this way can often lead to speedy resolution of problems, as the staff member may well be able to resolve the matter directly.

In all cases, both the staff member and the customer should keep a record of such an informal meeting.

Only where such efforts are unsuccessful, or where the staff member is the subject of the complaint or where a previous complaint is pending against them, should the formal procedure be invoked.

FORMAL COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

Where a complaint cannot be resolved informally it should be dealt with under the formal complaint procedure, which follows.

A.T.C.M.S. complaint procedures allow for two stages and an appeal. This procedure does not affect an individual's right to seek advice from or redress through external agencies established by legislation to deal with such matters.

Stage 1

Customers should put their complaint, preferable in writing, to a full-time member of staff. Where the complaint is against the staff member the matter should be raised with the committee's staff liaison officer.

The staff member, or the committee's staff liaison officer, should invite the customer to attend a hearing in order to discuss the complaint. The Customer should be advised of his/her right to be accompanied to the hearing by a third party representative. The staff member may request a representative from the committee to be in attendance at the hearing.

The staff member, or the committee's staff liaison officer, should respond in writing to the customer regarding their assessment of the complaint **within five working days of the hearing or, where no hearing has taken place, within five working days of receiving written notice of the complaint.**

If it is not possible to respond within the specified period the customer should be given an explanation for the delay and a timescale agreed when a response can be expected.

FORMAL COMPLAINT PROCEDURE (continued)

Stage 2

If the complaint remains unresolved after the first stage, or the complaint relates to their staff member or the committee's staff liaison officer, the customer should be permitted to raise the matter in writing with the committee, who will appoint a Complaints' Officer, other than the staff member or the committee's staff liaison officer, who heard the complaint at Stage 1.

The appointed complaints' officer should arrange to hear the complaint **within five working days of the request** to do so. The Customer should be advised of his/her right to be accompanied to the hearing by a third party representative. The complaint's officer may request another representative from the committee to be in attendance at the hearing.

Following the hearing, the appointed complaints' officer should, where possible respond in writing to the customer regarding their assessment of the complaint **within ten working days of the hearing**.

If it is not possible to respond within the specified time period the customer should be given an explanation for the delay and a timescale agreed when a response can be expected.

Appeal Stage

Where the matter cannot be resolved at Stage 2, the customer should be able to appeal the outcome, in writing, to the chairperson of the committee.

The appeal should be heard by two committee members who have not been involved in Stages 1 or 2. These members should be drawn from the committee as A.T.C.M.S. considers appropriate.

Customers should be permitted to present their case at the hearing, which should be held **within ten working days of the appeal request**, where practicable.

The Customer should be advised of his/her right to be accompanied to the hearing by a third party representative. The Appeal Panel may request another representative from the committee to be in attendance at the hearing.

Following the hearing, the Appeal Panel should give a decision on the complaint, in writing, within ten working days of the hearing and clearly indicate that this decision is conclusive and it is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

If it is not possible to respond within the specified time period the customer should be given an explanation for the delay and a timescale agreed when a response can be expected.

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Precautionary / Protective Suspension

Should a customer raise a complaint about the behaviour of a staff member or individual assisting in the delivery of A.T.C.M.S. activities, management may decide to suspend that individual(s). Such suspension would be appropriate in cases involving alleged gross misconduct and/or, where relationships have broken down and/or, where there is a risk to A.T.C.M.S. property or responsibilities to other parties. Such suspension should not be unnecessarily protracted and is without prejudice to the complaint's hearing and/or any subsequent disciplinary hearing.

Vexatious Complaints

Where A.T.C.M.S. considers the customer bringing the complaint is acting out of frivolous or vexatious motives for example, it may disallow a request to proceed to the next stage of the procedure.

RECORD KEEPING

Records should be kept throughout the complaint, detailing the nature of the complaint, the action taken and the reason for it, whether the complaint was resolved and at what stage and whether an appeal was lodged, its outcome and any subsequent developments.

On completion of the procedure these records should be placed in a sealed envelope and returned to the Manager to be placed in the complaints files where they will be carefully safeguarded and kept confidential.

Details of complaint records as noted above may be made available for inspection by the customer. In certain circumstances some information may be anonymised, for example, to protect a third party. However, in the case of records being requested by a relevant statutory body under an order for disclosure all records will be discoverable.

General information regarding instances of complaints and outcomes will be monitored with statistical information being provided to the committee bi-annually.

CHANGES TO COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURES

This complaints policy and associated procedures will be reviewed periodically in the light of any developments in legislation, customer relations practice or the changing needs of A.T.C.M.S. and if necessary revised, after consultation, in order to ensure its continuing relevance and effectiveness.

Any amendments or additions imposing new obligations will be introduced only after reasonable notice has been given to all customers.

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURES

APPENDICES

Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School

**NOTICE OF REFERENCE
COMPLAINT PROCEDURES**

WHEN COMPLETED THIS FORM SHOULD BE PASSED TO A STAFF MEMBER

1. Personal Details

Name:	
Address:	
Phone:	

2. Brief Description of Complaint *(continue on a separate sheet(s) if necessary)*

Please include information about who or what the complaint is about and provide details of dates, times, places, any other parties involved, etc. where appropriate.

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3. Witnesses *(if anyone witnessed the matter you are complaining about, please give their names below)*

Witness 1:
Witness 2:
Witness 3:

4. How would you prefer this matter to be dealt with? *(please tick the appropriate box below)*

Informally		Formally	
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NB: Where a grievance is considered by A.T.C.M.S. to be organisationally important it reserves the right to treat the matter formally.

5. What is your desired outcome?

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Signed: _____ Date: _____

For Official Use Only

Name of Staff Member:	
Relationship to Customer:	
Date Received:	

Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School

**MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO
NOTICE OF REFERENCE**

1. Stage of Complaint *(please tick appropriate box below)*

Informal		Stage 1	
Stage 2		Appeal	

2. Customer's Personal Details

Name:	
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Address:	
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Phone:	
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3. Complaints Procedure

Date Complaint Received:	
Action Taken: <i>(continue on a separate sheet(s) if necessary)</i>	

4. Outcome of Customer *(please tick appropriate box below)*

Resolved, No Further Action		Refer to Next Stage	
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Signed: _____
(Manager)

Date: _____

Signed: _____
(Complainant)

Date: _____