



COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Updated: 17 June 2025

POLICY

Here at PIABC Limited we believe that the needs of centre personnel and candidates are our top priority, and we are committed to providing quality services in the most effective and efficient way possible. However, we realise that, even in the best run organisations, there may be times when things go wrong, and you may not be happy with the service you receive.

If this happens or you feel that our services are not up to scratch, then let us know and we will do all we can to investigate and solve your problem as quickly as possible.

To help you make your comment or complaint in the most effective way and to the right person we have set up a procedure as listed on the following pages of this document.

When you make a complaint, you will receive:

- An acknowledgment within 5 working days
- A full response within 10 working days

However, if the complainant takes the complaint to the second and/or third stages the process will take much longer.

Who can complain?

The complainant should usually be the centre who has been directly concerned with or affected by the conduct of the awarding body.

If the complaint is from a candidate, they should contact their centre in the first instance and follow the procedures set out by that centre.

Likely nature of complaints

- Customer service (including administrative procedures)
- Quality assurance procedures (including centre monitoring and external verification)
- Procedures for inclusion, diversity and equal opportunities
- Registration procedures for candidates and centres
- Certification procedures
- The administrative/outcome complaints procedures

Please note that PIABC has separate policies and procedures for dealing with Malpractice & Maladministration (please refer to PIABC Limited's *Malpractice & Maladministration Policy and Procedure*); Academic and Assessment Appeals (please refer to PIABC Limited's *Assessment Review and Appeals Procedure*); and Access to Assessment (please refer to PIABC Limited's *Access to Assessment – Arrangements for Candidates needing Reasonable Adjustments, Special Consideration and/or Extenuating Circumstances in the Assessment Process*). Copies of these documents can be obtained from PIABC Limited via email (piabc@iom3.org).

It is important that you make your complaint as soon as possible after the event you want to complain about happens - usually PIABC Limited will only investigate complaints that are either:

- made within 6 months of the event; or
- made within 6 months of you realising that you have something to complain about as long as that is not more than 12 months after the event itself.

In exceptional circumstances, these time limits may be waived if there is valid documented evidence for not complaining earlier.

PROCEDURE

Stage 1 – Local Resolution (carried out at your Centre using internal procedures)

Stage 2 – PIABC Internal Investigation

Stage 3 – Independent Assessor

Stage 1 - Local Resolution (carried out at your Centre using internal procedures)

We believe that most complaints can be resolved at this stage. In many cases, it should be possible to sort out the problem straight away. This part of the procedure is called Local Resolution. If you would prefer to talk to an independent advisor, you can telephone or write to the Business Compliance & Administration Manager at PIABC Limited. Whoever you ask to look into your complaint, they will do their best to sort out the problem as quickly as possible. The centre should provide you with a written response to your complaint.

What if Local Resolution is unsuccessful?

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Local Resolution, then you must write to PIABC Limited itself who will consider taking your complaint to Independent Review. You should do this within 28 working days of the letter telling you about the outcome of Local Resolution action.

Stage 2 - PIABC Internal Investigation

Stage 2 involves two processes, the latter to be carried out at the discretion of the convenor.

Stage 2 involves the hearing of the case by the Head of PIABC. Your request, which is required to be made by letter, will be considered very carefully. You will be asked to explain in writing exactly why you are still dissatisfied, if you have not already done so. The letter should also include details of the original complaint, the actions taken by the centre and a copy of the centre's response. The convenor (Head of PIABC) will contact an independent lay person to help consider your case and will look at whether any other Local Resolution action might resolve your problem. If not, then the convenor will decide whether there should be an Independent Review of your complaint by a special panel.

The convenor does not have to set up a panel every time one is requested. He/she will only do so if he/she thinks that a panel investigation is likely to resolve the problems you have identified. Either way, you will be informed of the convenor's decision in writing, generally within 28 working days of your letter requesting a Stage 2 process. If he/she decides to set up a panel, he/she will tell you what matters the panel will investigate.

The panel will have three people – an independent lay person acting as chair, the convenor, and one other person. The panel will re-examine fully the concerns referred to it by the convenor, talking to everyone involved, and getting any specialist advice it needs. It will then prepare a report setting out the results of its investigations, together with its conclusions and any appropriate comments or suggestions. You will be given a copy of the report, and the Head of PIABC will write to you to tell you of any actions being taken as a result of the panel's recommendations. This process will generally take no longer than 28 working days from the receipt of the convenor's letter to yourself informing you that a panel meeting will take place.

Stage 3 – Independent Assessor

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response received from PIABC, then a complaint may be made to the appropriate qualification's regulator. A regulator will exercise its discretion in dealing with the complaint. Regulators remit does not normally cover complaints relating to the quality of teaching/training and funding issues.

APPEAL PROCESS

You can also make an appeal against the decision. For details of this appeals process, please refer to PIABC Limited's *The Appeals Process (For Appeals against PIABC Decisions)*. A copy of this document can be obtained from PIABC Limited via email (piabc@iom3.org).

CONTACTING THE REGULATOR

If you have followed PIABC Limited's complaints procedure and appeals procedure and would still like to take your complaint further, you can contact the appropriate qualifications regulator:

CCEA Regulation	info@ccea.org.uk
Ofqual	public-enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk
SQA Accreditation	accreditation@sqa.org.uk

SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICE OMBUDSMAN (SPSO)

(Users of public bodies in Scotland only)

Users of public bodies (e.g. FE Colleges) in Scotland have the right to complain to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) as the final arbiter. Users have to exhaust the public body's own complaints procedure before the SPSO will consider their complaint, and it must usually have been raised within the previous 12 months. The complaint cannot be under consideration in a court of law.

The SPSO defines a complaint as "an expression of dissatisfaction by one, or more, customers about an FE College's lack, or lack, of action or about the standards or services provided by the FE College or on its behalf". FE Colleges are required to implement a documented complaints process which makes it plain that candidates can complain, in turn, and once the previous stage has been exhausted, to the Centre, to PIABC Limited, to SQA Accreditation, and to the SPSO. It must explain the circumstances in which each of these can be contacted. The SPSO will not consider complaints about academic decisions, such as the outcome of an assessment. These types of complaints should be treated as an Appeal; therefore, should follow PIABC Limited's "*Assessment Review and Appeals Procedure*". A copy of this document can be obtained from PIABC Limited via email (piabc@iom3.org).