

# British Medical Acupuncture Society

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## Complaints Policy

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## **BMAS Complaints Policy**

The British Medical Acupuncture Society (BMAS) views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint.

Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
- To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- To make sure everyone at the BMAS knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

### **Definition of a Complaint**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of the BMAS; however, a complaint will only be considered by the following procedure if it is stated to be a formal complaint.

### **Where Complaints Come From**

Complaints may come from any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in the BMAS.

A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email, or in writing.

This policy does not cover internal disciplinary complaints or grievances, which are covered by the discipline and grievance sections in the BMAS Employee Handbook.

This policy does not cover complaints by patients towards individual BMAS members, which is covered by the complaints section in the BMAS Code of Conduct.

### **Confidentiality**

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know, and following any relevant data protection requirements.

### **Responsibility**

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the BMAS Council of Trustees.

# Complaints Procedure of the British Medical Acupuncture Society

## Publicised Contact Details for Complaints

Written complaints may be sent to:

- BMAS House, 2/3 Winnington Court, Northwich CW8 1AQ
- or [julie@thebmas.com](mailto:julie@thebmas.com)
- BMAS, Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine, 60 Great Ormond St, London WC1N 3HR
- or [london@thebmas.com](mailto:london@thebmas.com)

Verbal complaints may be made by phone to 01606 786782 or 0207 713 9437 or in person to any BMAS staff or trustees at the Northwich or London offices or at any of our events or activities.

## Receiving Complaints

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have.

Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded. The person who receives a phone or in person complaint should:

- Confirm that the complainant wishes their complaint to be considered as formal
- Write down the facts of the complaint
- Take the complainant's name and contact details
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to the BMAS
- Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take
- Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words
- Organise for the complainant to receive acknowledgement of their formal complaint in writing together with a copy of this complaints procedure.

For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see Appendix 1.

## Resolving Complaints

### Stage One

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate.

Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be recorded in the complaints folder and passed to the chair of the complaints committee or other nominated trustee within 5 working days.

On receiving the complaint, if it has not already been resolved, the chair of the complaints committee or other nominated trustee will delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a week. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure should be attached.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within six weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

## Stage Two

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the chair or vice chair of the BMAS Council of Trustees.

The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within a week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The chair or vice chair of the BMAS Council of Trustees may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a suitably senior person to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within six weeks. If this is not possible because, for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

## External Stage

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage.

Information about the kind of complaints in which the Commission can involve itself can be found on their website at: [www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx)

## Variation of the Complaints Procedure

The Board may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about the chair or vice chair of the BMAS Council of trustees should not also have the same individual as the person leading a Stage Two review.

## Mediation

Mediation is an option provided at any stage and offered to both parties.

The chosen mediator ideally should be a trustee and agreed by both parties.

## Monitoring and Learning from Complaints

If sufficient in number, complaints can be reviewed from time to time to identify any trends that may indicate a need to take further action.

# Appendix 1

## Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation
- Listen – allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words.
- Sometimes a person just wants to *let off steam*
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry
- Show an interest in what is being said
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) – you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation eg *I understand that this situation is frustrating for you*
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.