

# BF COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This policy should be read in conjunction with the BF Customer Charter which sets our intentions for the service that we provide.

## 2. THE PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

This policy sets out how British Fencing will handle comments and complaints.

## 3. YOUR COMMENTS AND FEEDBACK

We are always looking for ways to improve the services that we offer and also to identify areas where we are doing well. Feedback and comments about our services are always welcome and this will be discussed at the appropriate time to improve the service that we offer. If you have feedback or comments that you wish us to consider we would encourage you to send it directly to the relevant staff and/or [headoffice@britishfencing.com](mailto:headoffice@britishfencing.com). We will acknowledge your email but typically, due to resource limitations, will not provide formal responses and updates.

## 4. YOUR COMPLAINTS

We hope you will be fully satisfied with the service you receive from British Fencing, but if you have a specific complaint about our service we want to hear from you. We will take your complaint seriously, and will address it and respond to it as quickly as possible given the resources we have. Only by listening to our customers can we hope to improve our overall levels of service.

## 5. THE DEFINITION OF A COMPLAINT

A complaint is...

"An expression of dissatisfaction about British Fencing's action, or lack of action, or about the

standard of a service, whether the action taken or the service was provided by a British Fencing staff member, a volunteer acting on behalf of British Fencing, or a body or organisation acting on behalf of British Fencing".

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A complaint is not...

An initial request for a service to be delivered within a published timescale, except where the consequential actions of British Fencing mean the definition of complaint, as defined above, are met.

### Complaints we can't help with

Generally speaking we will not be able to consider your complaint:

- If you wish to make it anonymously
- If you wish to disagree with one of our published policies
- If you wish to disagree with Home Country Association policies
- If you wish to disagree with wider government policy
- If you wish to disagree with a decision that was reached properly and in accordance with our policies and procedures
- If you wish to disagree with a refereeing decision

You are at any time welcome to provide feedback on these matters which will be dealt with as in Section 3.

## 6. WHO CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT?

Any member of the public or their representatives, staff, businesses, public and voluntary bodies can make a complaint about, or to, British Fencing.

## 7. HOW TO SEND YOUR COMPLAINT

You can send us your complaints on our service, which we will deal with confidentially, by telephone, online or in writing. Complaints should be made within 90 days of the incident giving rise to your concern. We may, at our discretion consider complaints raised after 90 days if there has been an understandable reason for the delay

### 7.1 INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

#### By telephone

Please call 0208 742 3032 and speak to a member of the Customer Services team.

#### In writing

Please email us, contacting the member of staff or volunteer in question and ask them to help you to resolve the matter. If you are unsure which member of staff or volunteer to contact, please email [headoffice@britishfencing.com](mailto:headoffice@britishfencing.com) or write to:

British Fencing Head Office, 1 Baron's Gate, 33-35 Rothschild Road, London W4 5HT

### 7.2 FORMAL COMPLAINTS

#### Online

Formal complaints should be submitted using the Formal Complaints form found on the BF website Contact Us page.

## 8. WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

To help us investigate your complaint, please provide as much of the following information as possible when you contact us:

- Whether it is an original complaint, or a follow-up to a reply you were not satisfied with
- A clear description of the complaint and ***what you would like us to do to sort things out***
- Details of any relevant membership number, license numbers and/or other reference numbers relating to any contacts you may previously have had with British Fencing on this subject (for example when calling our telephone service, or sending an email to volunteers or staff members)
- Your full postal address, telephone number (including dialling code), and email address if you have one.
- We may need to contact other parties in order to properly investigate your complaint. If you do not wish us to do so, or you wish to remain anonymous during these investigations, you must tell us although we reserve the right to refer serious matters to relevant enforcement authorities at any time.

## 9. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The following information sets out how we will handle your complaint and explains how we will seek to provide you with a satisfactory response.

#### Informal complaint

We hope that most complaints can be settled quickly and as close to the source of the problem as possible. Therefore if you are dissatisfied with a service we have provided or any other aspect of our contact with you, you should initially contact the member of staff or volunteer in question and ask them to help you to resolve the matter. If you are unsure which member of staff or volunteer to contact, please email [headoffice@britishfencing.com](mailto:headoffice@britishfencing.com).

The member of staff or volunteer will work with you to understand why you are dissatisfied and, if possible, take action to resolve the matter immediately and informally. If the resources are not available to resolve the matter immediately that will be explained. If it becomes apparent that informal resolution will not be possible you will be given the option to raise a formal complaint.

If you do not receive a response from the member of staff within 10 working days you should contact their line manager or the person with overall responsibility for the matter in question. This may be a member of staff or a volunteer. If you do not know who to contact please email [headoffice@britishfencing.com](mailto:headoffice@britishfencing.com).

We recognise that there may be circumstances under which you might prefer not to contact the member of staff/volunteer in question. In these cases you should contact the CEO in the first instance and in the event that the CEO is the member of staff, the Chair. Both can be contacted on [headoffice@britishfencing.com](mailto:headoffice@britishfencing.com)

### Formal complaint

If after contacting the member of staff or volunteer concerned you remain dissatisfied you should complete a Formal Complaint form which can be found on the Contact Us page of the BF website <link here>

We will acknowledge your formal complaint within seven working days. We hope to provide a response within 20 working days, but if this is not possible we will explain why and give you a date by which you can expect a response.

The responsible person will look into your complaint. He or she will review the facts and consider any information you have provided us with. At the end of your formal complaint we will write to you to tell you the outcome and explain any action we propose to take.

### Appeal

If your complaint is still not resolved you can ask our CEO to look into the matter. You can do this by emailing [headoffice@britishfencing.com](mailto:headoffice@britishfencing.com), cc'ing [complaints@britishfencing.com](mailto:complaints@britishfencing.com).

The Chief Executive will review the facts, consider any information you have provided us with and also review our prior handling of your complaint. The CEO may ask the Chair, a member of the Board or an independent person to assist in reviewing your complaint.

This may take up to 20 working days depending on the complaint.

After considering your appeal the CEO will write to you to tell you the outcome and explain any action that we propose to take.

### Disciplinary & Grievance

If your complaint is still not resolved you can in certain cases raise a disciplinary complaint or grievance – please contact [headoffice@britishfencing.com](mailto:headoffice@britishfencing.com) or visit the website [www.britishfencing.com](http://www.britishfencing.com) for more details.

### Ombudsman

If your complaint is still not resolved you can contact the British Fencing ombudsman - please contact [headoffice@britishfencing.com](mailto:headoffice@britishfencing.com) or visit the website [www.britishfencing.com](http://www.britishfencing.com) for more details.

## 10. COMPLAINTS - OTHER METHODS

In the event that you raise or pursue a complaint through other methods (for example sending us legal letters, complaints on shared social media posts etc) we reserve the right to respond in any way that we feel appropriate in timescales that we deem to be appropriate, and we may not be able to respond at all.

### 11. CONFIDENTIALITY

All complaints are treated with confidentiality in mind. Only the CEO and the staff resolving specific complaints in each service area will be aware that a complaint has been received and is being dealt with. We will respect anonymity, with respect to complainants, but, it is better for the complainant to provide contact details, so that they can be informed of the outcome.

### 12. WHAT WE EXPECT FROM YOU

We understand that if you have a complaint you are likely to feel strongly about it. We also understand that you may feel angry, frustrated or upset by the circumstances that led to your complaint and that this may cause you to act in a way that is out of character. Nevertheless we expect you to be polite and courteous to our staff and our volunteers and we will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour. There is a large amount of work in British Fencing being done by teams of volunteers and we expect complainants to respect that.

#### **Unreasonable complaints**

In most cases complaints can be dealt with quickly and simply. However, in a minority of cases complaints are pursued in unreasonable and inappropriate ways. We have no choice but to take action to protect our staff and volunteers where this is the case.

Unreasonable complaints are complaints that, because of the nature of the contact or frequency with which the complaint is pursued, hinder our ability to properly consider the matters at hand or place unwarranted demands on staff time. Unreasonable complaints may be justified grievances pursued in inappropriate ways, or they may be complaints which appear to have no substance, or which have already been fully investigated or responded to.

If we deem a complaint unreasonable we will take action that is proportionate to the nature and frequency of the complainant's contact with British Fencing. Appendix B sets out some examples. The decision to apply measures to manage unreasonable complaints will be taken by the CEO or Chair. The complainant will be informed of the measures in writing.

#### **Aggressive or Obsessive Complainants**

British Fencing wants to deal honestly and respectfully with complainants and ensure that other service users, staff or British Fencing as a whole do not suffer detriment from persons making vexatious, aggressive or obsessive complaints.

Examples of behaviour which could be defined as vexatious, aggressive or obsessive include – excessive and repeated attempts to contact staff and volunteers, pursuing multiple complaints against the organisation at the same time, making unreasonable demands of staff and volunteers, threats (including those of legal action) against staff/volunteers or the organisation, repeated raising of unreasonable complaints (see above), making multiple complaints to multiple external organisations about BF.

The CEO and Chair of British Fencing will write to complainants to inform them that their behaviour is considered to be unacceptable.

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If we experience aggressive, obsessive or vexatious behaviour from a complainant we will take action that is proportionate to the nature and frequency of the complainant's contact with the organisation. The decision to apply measures to manage complainants will be taken by the Chair or CEO. The complainant will be informed of the measures in writing.

If appropriate a complainant may be reported for Disciplinary proceedings.

### 13. COMPLAINTS ABOUT PARTNERS, SUPPLIERS AND SPONSORS

British Fencing recognises complaints regarding British Fencing's Partners, Suppliers, Sponsors and any organisation contracted to work for British Fencing, and will seek to resolve such complaints where they relate to British Fencing's activities and services. These complaints are useful to guide learning in future service delivery and contractual arrangements, and feedback on performance is given to Partners, Suppliers and Sponsors, on a regular basis. British Fencing will forward complaints received in respect of other organisations or appropriate bodies.

### 14. EQUALITIES STATEMENT

British Fencing aims to handle all complaints honestly and respectfully regardless of who makes a complaint. British Fencing treats all members of the community equitably and will not show bias to any particular individual or group.

### 15. MATTERS THAT ARE OUTSIDE THIS POLICY

The following matters are not included in this policy:

- Complaints which are subject to legal proceedings
- Complaints about member behaviour contrary to the British Fencing Code of Conduct (please see the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure)
- Adult statutory complaints
- Children statutory complaints

### 16. MONITORING PERFORMANCE

British Fencing enforces a staff appraisal system which includes an agreed Job Description for every member of staff, so that each member of staff has an agreed personal development plan. These plans are reviewed at least every six months. This regard for the development and training of our staff will ensure that, wherever possible, you will receive the appropriate experience in your dealings with our organisation.

We want and will actively seek feedback on the way we operate and the way we interact with our customers. These feedback procedures are defined above and will form an integral part of our ability to continually improve our service to our customers.

## 17. APPENDIX A. COMPLAINTS REGARDING REFEREEING DECISIONS

It is not the role of British Fencing, after the fight is finished, to investigate individual referees' decisions or comment on whether a hit was correctly awarded. We are aware that more and more bouts are recorded on devices, however once the fight is over, the result stands. Our position is that it is the responsibility of the fencer at the time to appeal to the referee or DT as appropriate within the rules of the sport.

The only decision that will get officially referred to BF for investigation is a decision involving a Black card. This is because we use the Disciplinary Process to put in place additional sanctions if appropriate.

We may from time to time review the types of complaints and use this to feedback to/or educate our referees, either individually or as a group, with the intention of helping and supporting them as they undertake a difficult but hugely valued role in the sport of Fencing.

## 18. APPENDIX B UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

Here are some examples of the actions and behaviours that may lead British Fencing to deem a complaint unreasonable:

- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of assistance from staff
- Refusing to co-operate with the complaints procedure while still wishing the complaint to be resolved
- Refusing to accept that some issues are not within the remit of our complaints procedure despite having been provided with the information
- Changing the basis of the complaint while the procedure is in process
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information or raising large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insisting they are all fully answered
- Adopting a 'scattergun approach': repeatedly contacting different members of staff with different information and/or questions, or pursuing a complaint simultaneously with a number of different public bodies
- Submitting a repeat complaint once the matter has been concluded or refusing to accept a decision and repeatedly arguing a point or complaining about the decision

If we deem a complaint unreasonable we will take action that is proportionate to the nature and frequency of the complainant's contact with British Fencing which may include:

- Refusing to consider further, additional complaints about a matter currently under consideration
- Placing limits on telephone conversations or personal contact – for example by limiting telephone contact to one named member of staff

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- By limiting the methods of contact available to the complainant – for example by limiting contact to written means only
- By refusing to consider matters that have already been comprehensively dealt with

**Last Approved by Board: 14/09/2021**